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The Editors

THE SUMU INDIANS
Anne Manuel

The miracle of the ordinary

Is Horton Foote America's greatest playwright?

MARIAN BURKHART

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CORRESPONDENCE

Who's shortsighted?

Wolfeboro, N.H.

To the Editors: It appears to me that David R. Carlin, Jr., knows little about the intricate business of education as he sets forth his somewhat warped views in "A Shortsighted Vision" [November 6]. Here he severely downgrades the overall educational objective of developing the student's full potential, and reports that his "stomach turns" every time he hears "full potential" mentioned. Obviously, achieving one's full potential is an all-encompassing and far-reaching goal, but it is hardly something so devastating as to turn one's stomach. Indeed, it is a goal that philosophers have supported for centuries.

It is about time somebody deflated the concept set forth by Carlin that "top administrators, are themselves not normally very well educated." Where does Carlin come up with such an idea? Like that of any other administrator in foundations, industries, and institutions, the educator must keep his organization on a sound footing while advancing the immediate aims and long-term objectives of the system. This calls for basic administrative skills coupled with a full understanding of where the education of youth should be headed. And most educational administrators — influenced by the views of their citizenry and the broad needs of the wider community — know where they are going.

So, when Carlin says that these administrators are no more than trained "managerial technicians," and "have no satisfactory vision of what their product should be like," he is unfortunately demonstrating a viewpoint based on superficial study and observation.

CARL E. WILLGOOSE

An unsettling issue

Northampton, Mass.

To the Editors: While much of modern literature seems based on the unspoken resolve to avoid social realities, especially if unsettling, the November 6 issue of *Commonweal* contains at least three pieces which challenge this norm. In the articles by Karen Sue Smith (on Women-Church), David Carlin, Jr. (on schools) and Abigail McCarthy (on television), one finds thoughtful analyses of our American predicament. Though Mr. Carlin is hardly enamored of the phrase "full potential," finding it too individualistic to describe genuine human development, I think it touches upon the powerful, but unspoken, theme of all three works. (Carl Rogers, a leading humanistic psychologist, coined the term "fully functioning person" during the sixties when the human potential movement was developing; that may be a bit better.) I think the mystique of such terms, and indeed the sixties themselves, reflects an innate human drive for liberation and empowerment from debilitating societal attitudes and norms.

The three *Commonweal* writers describe forces for human growth — feminism, complete education, and full citizenry — and the countervailing institutions that impede them. Perhaps what we urgently require, and are tentatively forging, is our own version of liberation theology. . . . LINDA BEACH

Jefferson & China

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I read with great interest Sudhir Sen's article, "Development Under Siege" [November 20]. It is an excellent article combining expertise, knowledge, keen analysis, and common sense. I do, however, take issue with one sentence: "In my own mind, China is now well set on a long march towards Jeffersonian democracy based on small farms and small business enterprises."

True, Chinese Marxism has become more flexible in allowing more scope for private initiative, the operation of market forces, and some decentralization. Yet power is still concentrated in China's Communist party, and big industry is, and is likely to remain, a major factor in its economy. China does not have the kind of cultural and historical background to which Jefferson and his compatriots were heirs. The latter inherited the results of centuries of gradual evolution of individual rights and restraints on rulers in England; consequently, the concepts of the U.S. Constitution and democracy had taken root among the American people long before they were written into law. China's culture and traditions are not Jeffersonian.

Of course, Dr. Sen writes of a "long march," and great change could occur over centuries. I am sure we would both be happy to see China develop into a more prosperous and free society in the context of its own history and traditions.

SEYMOUR M. FINGER

What's in a name?

Sloatsburg, N.Y.

To the Editors: Is there really such a word as *ethicist* ["Dominion Over the Earth," by Gabriel Moran, December 4]?

Oxford allows that it may appear in other dictionaries, but whether it does or not, it is certainly a word of great ugliness, and seems part of a modern trend to write everything as if preparing a cable to be sent at a very high cost per word.

NORMAN D. ARBAIZA

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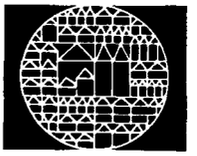

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A never-ending process

In accepting the Nobel Prize for his Central American peace plan, Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias said: Peace "is not the product of a victory or command. It has no finishing line, no final deadline, no fixed definition of achievement. Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions."

The House vote cutting off aid to the *contras* at the end of February was one such decision. The alternate plan promised by House Speaker Jim Wright is coming up. Given the politics of defeating the earlier *contra* aid bill, passing some such plan is a foregone conclusion. Whether the Wright alternative becomes part of the peace process may depend on whether it pushes for a cease-fire and appropriates only the absolute minimum needed to forestall another administration request and to discourage the *contras* from attacking the civilian population for supplies. "Humanitarian" aid should be just that—food, clothing, medical supplies, and shelter. Its delivery, in kind not cash, should be arranged through a neutral group, the Red Cross or the United Nations, or through a third country, possibly Canada or Spain.

The House plan should move the peace process along by building-in incentives, for example, by providing funds for the repatriation of *contra* soldiers and the resettlement of refugees now displaced in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the region. Disincentives to renewed fighting and a long, low-level guerrilla war are equally important, for example, by setting a cut-off date for the delivery of supplies to men under arms. Obviously, efforts must be made to take the Soviets up on their offers to reduce military aid to the Sandinistas—a process that may have begun with Daniel Ortega's October visit to Moscow.

Getting all of that in place still does not mean there will be peace. Even with a cease-fire, there is likely to be a long and possibly heated struggle between the Sandinistas and the *contras*, and within each of their ruling elites. The Reagan administration has always hoped for the overthrow of the Sandinistas and fed, literally and figuratively, the *contras'* belief that they could achieve that through military action. Eight years of aid, covert and overt, have not succeeded and there is no evidence that it can. The net result of the *contra* military actions has been to kill and maim civilians and, in tandem with Sandinista mismanagement, to ruin the economy.

The Sandinistas have long claimed that the war necessitated many of the steps, such as closing *La Prensa* and conscripting young men into military service, which the *contras* and the Reagan administration have taken to be signs of antidemocratic convictions. The war has also kept the Sandinistas from entrenching themselves as a dictatorial power. Now a cease-fire can create space and time for a more routine political life.

But even if the political means are at hand, they may readily be turned to

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instruments of a new form of struggle. Both the Sandinistas and the *contras* will provoke and parry; each will claim to speak for the people and the Nicaraguan national interest; each will try to discredit and do away with its opponents. The Nicaraguan people are going to see more violence before they see peace. Having never had a democratic society, Nicaragua's chances of establishing one under these conditions seem tenuous indeed. Nonetheless, a cease-fire and the political evolution of the country should be supported by the United States bowing out of the action, at least militarily, and allowing the Sandinistas, the *contras*, and the democratic opposition to begin working within the framework of the Arias peace plan.

In the waning months of the Reagan administration, it is crucial for Congress to show its support of the peace plan by maintaining control of the purse strings and of the president and his Assistant Secretary for Latin Affairs, Elliott Abrams. The Democratic House—and presidential aspirants—will be threatened with the specter of losing the Red Hordes on the banks of the Rio Grande. There will be a variety of appeals to the importance of maintaining our national credibility. If we abandon the *contras* now, who will ever trust the U.S. again? There will be provocations that will attempt to draw the U.S. back into the fighting—provocations that could as easily be staged by the Sandinistas and *contras*, as by our own CIA. Congress and the Democrats should resist this form of political blackmail by examining the premises and outcomes of Reagan's policy.

That policy has been defended on the grounds of national security. In fact, the Reagan administration has been conducting something else, an anti-Communist crusade with the assistance of highly dubious allies. The drug trafficking, the corruption, and the military domination that have become part of this alliance, may prove a bigger threat to the U.S. than any subversion the Sandinistas were ever likely to export to El Salvador, Honduras, or any other Central or Latin American nation.

Instead, eight years of Reagamania have only entrenched military domination in Honduras and El Salvador. In both countries civilian governments remain unable to control the U.S.-supported-and-supplied military who tolerate the veneer of democracy to ensure continued aid. In once-democratic Panama, General Noriega refuses to budge despite demonstrations and internal pressures from the Panamanian people and despite two indictments in Florida.

Testimony continues in Washington about drug trafficking and corruption among the military in both Panama and Honduras. Millions of dollars have flowed into the coffers of General Noriega in Panama and military leaders in Honduras, some of it apparently with the knowledge of the Drug Enforcement Agency, the CIA, and the Southern Command of the U.S. Army. Supplying the addiction of young people and the populations of our inner cities seems not to have been too high a price to pay to keep the Panamanian and Honduran military on our side.

These recent revelations and the ones that, no doubt, are yet to come will point—as this journal often has—to the need to define precisely and narrowly our essential security goals (see, *Commonweal*, May 4 and June 15, 1984 and June 21, 1985). These goals can reasonably be negotiated with the Soviet Union and individual Central American nations. We need not bankroll every army in the region and attempt to overthrow every government that does not abide by our preferences.

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW

Solomon had it easy. Faced with two women both claiming to be the mother of one child, Solomon bluffed, gambling that the real mother would cry out to spare the infant.

The New Jersey Supreme Court faced a more complicated set of decisions in the Baby M case—decisions about motherhood; about parental custody; about the sale/purchase of a woman's ability to bear children; about the validity of a surrogacy contract—knowing that none of its rulings could spare the child completely.

Still, several components of the court's decision in this case deserve to be followed by other courts—or better, written into the body of developing state laws about surrogacy.

First and most importantly, the New Jersey court declared surrogacy-for-pay to be a form of baby-selling, and invalidated the surrogacy contract prepared by the Infertility Center of New York. Against the claims of the Sterns' lawyer, who argued that $10,000 was payment not for a child but for the surrogate's "services," Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz noted contract stipulations that would withhold the full payment, or pay only a portion, if the child died before or at birth, even though services would have been fully rendered.

While surrogacy is still permitted in New Jersey, it is legal only if voluntary, i.e., if no money is exchanged and the mother is able to change her mind after the child's birth and to assert her parental rights.

Fortunately, the outlawing of monetary gain, the great risks of a mother's backing out, and the spectacle of agony illustrated by the Baby M case are likely to put an end to the growth of the surrogate-motherhood business, and make all prospective parties to such an agreement think twice about the consequences, especially for the child.

When the court restored parental rights to Mary Beth Whitehead-Gould and revoked the adoption of the child by Elizabeth Stern, it reversed the ruling of the lower court. It also clarified the situation of the natural mother, which had been obscured both by the term "surrogate" and by the mother's agreeing in writing to relinquish her child. The court found the desire of the natural mother to bond with her infant and take on parental responsibility, *despite having signed a contract*, to be a value worth upholding in law: "We think it is expecting something well beyond normal human capabilities to suggest that this mother should have parted with her newly born infant without a struggle....We do not know of, and cannot conceive

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of, any other case where a perfectly fit mother was expected to surrender her newly born infant, perhaps forever, and was then told she was a bad mother because she did not.''

The court said explicitly that Mary Beth Whitehead-Gould had never been found unfit. Why, then, did the court not follow its own logic and reverse the custody decision of the lower court which awarded the child to the father? As it now stands, the sad struggle over Baby M will continue.

Where is the self-sacrificing parent in Solomon's story?

THE GAPOLINSKY FACTOR

Four years ago, curious to know what the American electorate was thinking about the nuclear question during the Mondale-Reagan election, Jonathan Schell began to interview a Milwaukee family he called the ''Gapolinskys.'' The February 12 issue of *Commonweal* carried a review of *History in Sherman Park*, the book Schell eventually wrote about the political views of the Gapolinskys, their friends, relatives, former teachers, and local political leaders.

As another presidential election year opens, Schell's report raises important questions about this country's political needs, the ways in which the candidates do and do not address them, and the electorate's ability to sort out and see through the candidates to the issues themselves.

Gina and Bill Gapolinsky were concerned about a variety of issues. But as Schell quickly learned, their concerns had little political direction and they were not tied to any particular political agenda or political party. Nor was the Gapolinskys' sketchy knowledge about any of these issues much strengthened between September and the election in November. Their major campaign interests focused on the candidates themselves.

Though they read the daily newspaper, the Gapolinskys' chief sources of information about the presidential campaigns were the televised debates and TV news. They talked little with anyone about the election; nor were they canvassed by local Democrats or Republicans. A presidential campaign was going on; major alternatives in conducting the country's business were at stake—or so the candidates claimed. But except for Schell's conversations with them, would the Gapolinsksys have taken as much interest as they did?

The 1988 election is at hand; most of 1984's issues have become even more pressing; there are seven Democratic and five Republican candidates in the primaries; there have been five televised debates, with thirteen more scheduled; and there will be thirty-six state primaries or caucuses between February 8 and June 7. We have abandoned the smoke-filled rooms and choices by party bosses, but it is hard to see that voters like the Gapolinskys are much better off.

In Schell's portrait they were intelligent, hard-working people willing to articulate their self-interest and, in Gina's case, even to see that their self-interest was linked in important ways to the well-being of the poor and the blacks who shared Sherman Park's schools and neighborhood. But linking that self-interest to a systematic and serious political outlook is a problem—for the Gapolinskys and for any voter who doesn't spend most of his or her waking hours thinking, reading, and talking politics.

Political parties once filled that role, providing an interpretive framework for connecting people's understanding of what needed doing with a larger political vision, with a candidate, and with a legislative agenda. But the decline of the political party and a cohesive political outlook is not the only problem (and if the Gapolinskys and their circle are any example, fragmentation and weak party affiliations are problems for Republicans and Democrats alike). The decline of political coherence is further encouraged by the length and complexity of what has become a two-year presidential campaign, and the distorting effect of the media's efforts to demonstrate the newsworthiness of the whole shebang. There are too many primary campaigns, with their multiplicitous means of selecting delegates. A few states have assumed a disproportionate influence in shaping the country's political agenda. Finally, the length and exhausting pace of the campaign is coming to look more and more like a hazing than a honing process for the candidates themselves.

When the campaign ends next November there will be the usual lamentations about low voter turn-out and the indifference of the American electorate. There will be a president whose physical stamina, if not political astuteness, has been tested. And there will be all of the political issues—the deficit, Central America, trade imbalances, unemployment, housing, world debt, the Middle East, arms control—still to be addressed.

Rather than the occasion for political stock-taking, our campaign and election process has become a mechanism for obscuring and diffusing the issues. We need to snap out of our self-induced confusion and begin connecting our pressing political and economic needs to the candidates' views, to a legislative agenda, and to a party platform. Now is the time, as the primary elections get under way, to begin taking notes for overhauling the whole system.

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THE AIDS TEST

AN ELUSIVE PROCEDURE

ACCESS & CONFIDENTIALITY

I am a middle-aged heterosexual who has no known contact with IV drug users. So being told that I had to take an AIDS blood test to qualify for foreign service held no terrors for me—well, hardly any terrors.

Since my wife was a member of New York City's Health Insurance Plan (HMO), I contacted our family doctor, was interviewed about the reason for wanting to take the test, and was then given a form instructing me to telephone a special center for an appointment.

I telephoned and after much "hold on, please" was connected with a young lady who inquired about the shape of the form I had been given. Was it horizontal or vertical? Mine was horizontal. "Wrong one, that's the old one. We won't give you the test if you bring in that form."

My physician's nurse was puzzled about the need for a new form: "The administrator hasn't given us any new forms; I'll have to call him." Three days later I still hadn't heard from her and for a week after neither she nor my physician returned my telephone calls.

Since I was going to New Haven on another matter, I called a physician friend and was told, "Sure, my lab can do the test for you." The blood was drawn in a few minutes and I was told my physician in New York would be notified by the end of the week.

The following day my wife received a call from the lab saying, "Hah, hah, you won't believe this, but we dropped the blood sample for your husband's lab work." Of course she knew I was taking the test, but what if she hadn't? The lab's call would have been troublesome.

No opportunity to go back to New Haven, even though they graciously offered to re-do the test without charge. So I began telephoning labs in Queens and nearby Nassau county. Six of them did not do it and suggested I telephone hospitals. I spoke with Long Island Jewish and the fourth person there said they couldn't do it and suggested the New York City AIDS Hotline. The first call brought a recorded message saying all counselors were busy, the hotline was open from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M., and please hold on for the next available counselor. Pause. Then I was disconnected. As I would be for the next twelve times I called the number and got the recorded message (in Spanish as well as English).

I tried calling the general number for the Board of Health and was only referred back to the Hotline number with its propensity for disconnecting holders ("Are you sure it's doing that? It shouldn't").

Sometime around 8 P.M., after the TV news (which reported that New York City would continue to be the AIDS capital of the world for the near future), I tried the AIDS Hotline one more time. Now I got a live human voice, a nice young man who told me that they couldn't help me get a test since all of their work was confidential (it would be released only to me) and if I wanted it sent to someone in writing I would have to find my own doctor. But he would help me . . . and he did, although there were no doctors in Queens in his directory and I refused his offer of a telephone number to call where a listing of Queens doctors might be found. He gave me the name of a Manhattan doctor.

It is now near midnight and I have spent the better part of the day trying to arrange for a test to determine if I have the virus that could lead to my death and, possibly, the death of my wife . . . and I am still not certain I will have the test soon.

As I said, I am in a very low-risk group and the likelihood of a positive result is very, very remote. The experience has been annoying but, ultimately, it will be humorous when I recount it.

But it is heartless if men and women in high-risk groups, who have real fears that they may have been exposed, are encountering the same frustrations.

JOSEPH D. POLICANO

Joseph D. Policano is a New York City businessman who has volunteered for the Peace Corps.

MEETING IN SALAMANCA

READY FOR ROME

DEFINING EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES

What is the nature and authority of bishops' conferences? The recent controversy over the document on the pastoral treatment of AIDS victims issued in December by the administrative board of the United States Catholic Conference has once again raised these questions. It is the latest chapter in a discussion that began with Vatican II, which strongly recommended that such conferences be established to foster harmony and cooperation among bishops and to promote a pastoral response to the challenges of the modern world.

The council itself vigorously debated the theological foundations of bishops' conferences, their juridical authority, their relationship to the Holy See and to individual bishops—topics that have continued to be debated. Following Vatican II the number of conferences greatly increased and many have become extremely important instruments of the church's pastoral activity.

By 1969 enough questions had been raised about the role of conferences, and particularly about the fashion in which they responded to Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*, that an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops was convened to

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discuss the relations between the conferences and the Holy See, and among themselves. The debates continued during the revision of the Code of Canon Law, which did not settle all the questions. As bishops' conferences issued more frequent statements, including those of the United States addressing concrete political and economic issues, the questions returned with renewed urgency. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in *The Ratzinger Report* (Ignatius Press, 1985), expressed some rather sharp criticisms of the conferences, criticisms which to some degree framed the question as it was posed at the 1985 extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops.

That synod did not attempt to settle the disputed theological and canonical questions, but simply suggested that "since bishops' conferences are so useful, indeed necessary in the present pastoral work of the church, a study of their theological status is desired, and especially a clearer and more profound explanation of their doctrinal authority." John Paul II assigned this task to a special commission under the Congregation for Bishops. The commission has now finished its work and is circulating a first draft, an *Instrumentum laboris*, inviting comments from the conferences and from individual bishops.

The synod's recommendation that conferences be given fuller study was also welcomed by scholars, a group of whom met in Paris in 1986 to plan a colloquium. From January 2-9, 1988 their plans were carried out, when an international and interconfessional group of fifty theologians, canonists, historians, and sociologists met in Salamanca, Spain for a week's study.

Initial discussions identified five central questions: What is the theological foundation for bishops' conferences? What is their relation to the mission of the church, especially the teaching function in the church? What is their relation to particular churches or dioceses, and to groupings of these? What are the results of the experience with conferences to date? How are these conferences working today? Not all of these could be wrestled with in a week-long colloquium, but some received fairly detailed attention, especially those concerning the theological basis for conferences and their teaching authority. The colloquium also discussed the application of the principle of subsidiarity within the church, which has a direct bearing on the role of bishops' conferences in the overall life of the church.

The phantoms of the press

My wife and I are throwing a very unusual surprise party for a journalist friend of ours this month. We're inviting every single unidentified "source" whose opinions appeared in a single day's editions of the *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. We'll be catering for eighty-five.

We expect it to be a lively crowd. The business community will be represented by such figures as "a trading manager for a Persian Gulf oil company," "a spokesman for Merrill Lynch," "a shipping source," "an industry source," and "one video dealer." From the political community we will have "a western diplomat," "a top agency official," "a politburo member" and several "senior administration officials." They will be sitting at the same table as "a court spokesman," "a former radical," "two presidential spokesmen," and "an administration realist." We can't wait to find out who *he* is.

Though most of our guests will be the rich and the powerful, or those who do their bidding, the hoi polloi will be on hand, too. "Neighbors" — the ones who "said" things to the *New York Post* — will be in attendance, alongside "a relative" and "a family spokesman." Serving them will be "our waiter," "a cocktail waitress," and "the bartender." He'll be the one taking care of the "young government officer sipping a cold beer, a taste threatened by the Islamic Fundamentalist tide." The Islamic Fundamentalist tide has not been invited, parking being tight in Tarrytown.

Backstage gossip at the event will be provided by the "sources" who reported "DeNiro doesn't take any lip." Our guests will be regaled with inside sports dope from "one Met elder," and "the aforementioned National League superscout." Not sitting at the same table will be the "Met who asked not to be identified." Instead, he will be sitting behind a partition with "the unnamed pilot," and "an official who spoke anonymously."

Since our journalist friend has covered many beats, we would be disappointed in ourselves if we failed to invite the "convicted burglar and robber" cited in the *Times* and the "Transvestite and alcoholic" who was quoted in the *Post*. However, we *will* take the precaution of seating them at the same table as "a police spokesman," "a law enforcement source," and "police."

In an attempt to keep the guest list at a reasonable size, my wife and I decided not to invite such shadowy figures as "many analysts," "other economists," "many sophisticated investment advisers," "veterans," or "those in the industry who believe." We also decided, after much soul-searching, not to invite "some survivors of *The Titanic*," because the salvaging operation the French have undertaken may have put them in a bum mood, and we're planning to have a ball.

JOE QUEENAN

Joe Queenan is a free-lance writer based in Tarrytown, New York. His work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, *the* New Republic, *and other publications.*

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Although the practices of conferences preceded theory, there is a theological and not merely a canon-law foundation for them. The colloquium began with a look at the experience to date, including a review of the debates of Vatican II and the experience of conferences since; a historical examination, back to the first millennium, of precedents in bishops' gatherings and Rome's attitude toward them; an analysis of how conferences relate to local bishops and to the Holy See; and a carefully reasoned argument for their theological status. From this, four elements emerged as a theological basis for bishops' conferences.

First, the mission of the church calls for a grouping beyond the local diocese, but more localized than central church authority. The world to which the Gospel is addressed is not just small communities. Today the church exists on an increasingly larger and more complex stage; the efforts of local parishes and dioceses are not enough. The church needs to be present to the wider realities of our day, which often take place on a national as well as regional basis.

Furthermore, bishops have a special responsibility for evangelization. For them to have an impact on this wider scene, it is necessary for them to act as a group. Bishops' conferences provide this, and are needed to maintain unity in faith, fraternity, and charity at this level of mission.

Second, conferences of bishops are based on the nature of the church as a communion of churches. The particular churches or dioceses are not isolated units but are bound together in a true communion. Indeed, it is this communion of particular churches which is characteristic of the Catholic church. Historically this has been expressed in gatherings of bishops, whether in local councils or in other ways. Today, as Vatican II and recent popes have emphasized, bishops' conferences serve this function on a regular basis, while plenary or provincial councils take place more rarely.

The communion of churches is something which exists all along a continuum, from very local groupings to the universal communion of the whole church. These various groupings are rooted in the social reality of human life, and one of these realities is the regional or national basis on which bishops' conferences are formed.

Third, as groupings of bishops, conferences have a sacramental basis. After sharp debate, Vatican II came to the position that episcopal consecration is sacramental, and that the functions bishops carry out are rooted in this sacrament. As they gather in conferences, bishops carry out the evangelizing, sanctifying, and governing functions which are theirs in virtue of the sacrament of orders.

Fourth, bishops' conferences express the collegiality of bishops. This is primarily a theological reality, before it is a canon-law concept. A collegial "instinct" or "sensus" is supposed to exist among all the bishops as members of the episcopal college. This does not simply express good feeling; to be genuine, it must find practical expressions. The solicitude one bishop has for another is an example of this collegial sense, sometimes expressed in sharing personnel or financial support. Another, is bishops working together in the same nation or region to face common problems and concerns. Bishops' conferences are certainly an apt structure through which to do this.

The scholars in Salamanca considered other elements for developing a theological basis for bishops' conferences, but found them too ambiguous to be useful at this time.

Finally, several questions remain open. What is the most appropriate geographical or political basis for bishops' conferences? What is the significance of "culture" in how the "local" church is defined? Are there analogous ways to being a bishops' conference? Is there a danger of clericalization in the fact that these conferences do not include a broader cross-section of the people of God?

The question of conferences' teaching authority, which also received attention at Salamanca, is often posed this way: Do conferences as such have any teaching authority? Or, is it only individual bishops who have authority, which they exercise in a coordinated way when a conference issues a statement? But has a statement any more authority than that of the individual bishops who issued it? To put the question more baldly, how much are individual bishops bound by a statement from an episcopal conference?

Two different approaches to the questions turned up remarkable convergences. The discussions that followed also suggested agreement among the various scholars that conferences as such, and not just the bishops who are present at a meeting, do have a true teaching authority. This teaching is limited only by what limits the bishops' pastoral office itself.

There seemed to be no problem with the proposition that the general assembly of a bishops' conference could exercise this teaching function. But views were divided on whether a committee (even the central or administrative committee of a conference) could exercise it. Other open questions concern how teaching documents of a conference are developed, whether such statements carry binding authority, and the danger of a certain inflation in teaching statements.

The question of subsidiarity was approached from two directions, one from the perspective of organizational theory, and the other from the state of the theological debate within the church. On the latter, a review of the considerable theological and canonical literature led to the conclusion that it is the underlying ecclesiological questions, rather than the principle itself, that need further clarification. While that task is going on, the practical issues for which subsidiarity has been invoked should not be neglected.

Subsequent discussions suggested agreement that the principle is useful today. Subsidiarity applies in the church, but as a formal principle whose content will be determined according to the subject matter to which it is applied, for example the issue of centralization in the church.

The Salamanca colloquium was conceived from the start as a scholarly contribution to the debate over episcopal conferences. It concluded by recommending topics that need further

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study, which included the distinction between "divine law" and "human law" in the church, a comparison of the statutes of the conferences, the theological status of all groupings of churches, the teaching authority of the conferences, the meaning of collegiality, and the relationship between the conferences and their administrative organs. Another issue which came up repeatedly throughout the week and which needs clarification is the present process for the selection of bishops.

At week's end there was common agreement that the colloquium had achieved its scholarly goals and that it might represent a model for the way in which scholars can contribute with the hierarchy to on-going discussions in the church. The papers will be available later this spring. By then the bishops will be at work commenting on the draft statement Rome has prepared on bishops' conferences. Their task may well be helped by the homework already done in Salamanca.

JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK & JAMES H. PROVOST

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OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

IS THERE NO END IN SIGHT?

GETTING READY FOR THE MILLENNIUM

I had an interesting time in a Chicago cab last winter. The driver was a pleasant man, full of jokes about the terrible weather. He picked up my wife, my son, and me in front of a hospital and drove us to our hotel through a near blizzard. We noticed that he had a television set in the front seat of his cab, which is, I think, illegal. It wasn't the first illegal thing we'd seen done in a cab, and he was driving steadily and safely enough.

The news was on. We heard something about the murder of a woman we had met once, the friend of some friends. When I mentioned it to my wife the driver overheard and said, "I'm sorry evil has touched you so close, brother, but you know it's only going to get worse, now that we're in the Last Days." We made the sort of noncommittal sounds most non-fundamentalists do when the Last Days are brought up so earnestly, and he went on: "Yes, the son of Satan is on the earth now, and we think we have a pretty good idea who he is." It turned out that a rather convoluted interpretation of Scripture had made it clear to our driver and members of his church that the European Economic Community was prefigured in the Old Testament, and through a further extrapolation it was revealed that the Anti-Christ was . . .

King Juan Carlos of Spain. No kidding. The driver gave me a sheaf of photocopied evidence which he kept in a box in the front seat of the cab.

I realized after we left the cab ("See you on the way up!" the driver said cheerily as we stepped out) that he was not crazy; he had a view of the world which, like the view of committed Communists or Reaganites, explained the world neatly and left no stray ends dangling. He was not any crazier than people who talk to crystals or than Shirley McActress and her reincarnations. He was, unlike serious Communists or Young Republicans, harmless, in that no violence seemed to be contemplated against King Juan Carlos, since his temporary triumph was fore-ordained and therefore inevitable. We had only to be forewarned, and to pray.

Pat Robertson has made similar loony uses of Scripture, and it has to be said that he acts in a long tradition, one which goes back at least as far as the Middle Ages. The Last Days always seem to loom at times when the calendar moves towards a flip of the zeros; with a millennial shift only twelve years away, it is not unusual that *the* Millennium is being talked about. Perhaps because some of those who are so insistent on the Last Days are so obviously silly, mainstream Christians have moved away almost completely from serious consideration of the end of our age, and the Second Coming of Christ.

At the risk of being put into the loony camp, I must say that this is a mistake. I don't mean that it makes any sense to try to find out from a squinty search of the Bible just when the Last Days will begin. There were reports that in Russia a number of people saw a special significance in Revelation 8:10-11: "And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter." The Russian word for "wormwood" is "Cherynobyl." This interesting fact is enough to set all sort of bibliolaters atwitter, but it is beside the point. What is not beside the point is the fact that the end of time and the Second Coming of Christ were very much a part not only of early Christian consciousness, but apparently of Jesus' own thinking.

There are several ways to look at Scripture which could let us off the hook here. One says that the early church, hemmed in and harried as it was, longed for an end to persecution and had a stake in looking for the Last Days, and read this longing back into the words of Jesus. At an extreme, this way of looking at Scripture makes everything a product of the limited mind-set of first-century Jewish and Greek converts, and effectively denies that Scripture really tells us anything about Jesus, but rather tells us about the various contending schools of early Christianity.

Apart from the fact that this sharply contradicts the way in which Scripture

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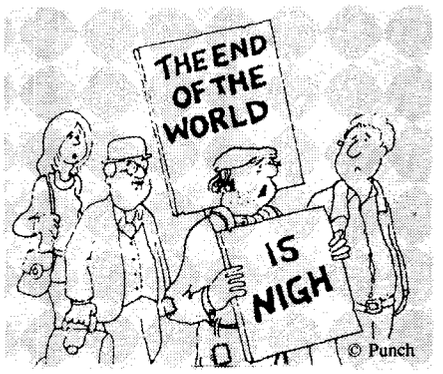
has been used by the church throughout its history, it brings up another problem: the Bible is seen as something into which we twentieth-century secular sorts have a privileged insight, one hidden from St. Basil the Great, St. Jerome, the Fathers of the Desert, and most of the people who have read it prayerfully throughout history. Without denying what modern scholarship can offer us, and without accepting the fundamentalist notion of scriptural literalism or inerrancy, I think one thing must be insisted on: the Gospels give us a more or less accurate picture of the teaching of Jesus, one to which (if we are Christians) we must pay some attention.

What stands out is the place Jesus gives to the end of time, the final days, and the need for Christians to live as if the end could come at any moment. There was certainly a change in the way the church lived in and with the world when time passed, and the end seemed nowhere in sight. Various major events (the fall of Rome was obviously one of them) were taken at first as indications that here it was at last . . . but with its power centers rearranged, the world went on as before.

Christian teaching on the Last Days gradually began to take an individualistic turn: we should, each of us, live as if the last day could come at any moment, because in fact there will be a moment when each of us will have a last day, and face judgment. An agnostic might deny the judgment part, but no one can deny the truth of the rest of the idea (though we usually live as if we could). Still, something significant is dropped out of this approach to Jesus' teaching, a teaching which takes the form of a warning.

The world is to be transformed, in all of its aspects; it is to be "made new" in every way. This theme is found not only in the Book of Revelation, but can also be found in Paul, who speaks of all of nature groaning as if in childbirth, as it moves towards that moment, and it can be found throughout the Gospels. It is a simple moral conversion that is asked of us, individually. Collectively we await the renewal of everything, and the job we have been given is to be alert and ready for it. One important consequence of this belief is that we are moved away from individualism and mere moralism. The point is not simply for me to avoid evil personally, though I must do that; I must also treat the earth as something which will be transformed, and live with others as people whose lives are to be made capable of a divine transformation. Much of what we consider Christian morality is in this sense a means to an end—a readiness, an alertness. This is undertaken not only so that I can avoid condemnation; it is part of the midwife's job we have, to be ready when the moment of birth comes.



There is something paradoxical about the ways in which that last day is presented. It will close on us like a trap; Paul says it "comes in fire." We are warned that the last times will be full of distress, and are even told that we will know, when "these signs appear," that the end is near. In fact, Jesus says, "this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done" (Mark 13:30). This would seem to give encouragement to those who scour the newspapers for clues to God's schedule. But this passage is followed by one which says that only God knows when these things will happen, and no one else, "no man, no, not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father." Then Jesus compares us to servants who have been given a task, in the absence of a master who will return at an unknown moment, ordering the doorkeeper to stay awake. "What I say to you, I say to all: Watch."

Two things occur to me here. One is that *not* knowing the time of the end is itself important, an encouragement to the alertness which is our vocation. The other is that a belief in the end of time emphasizes the universal, collective, and cosmic meaning of Jesus' teaching. Individual morality alone does not; it could exist in a world which will go on forever, as well as one with an end in the near or far future. It could even conceivably exist in a world in which there were no other human beings. The judgment with which individual morality is concerned turns us in on ourselves and our own salvation. A belief in the last days, one which places us in a household of servants who have been asked to do their task and pay attention, does not allow us to separate our personal morality from that of the surrounding community.

In another account of the final judgment, in Matthew 25, it is said explicitly that what we have done or failed to do for one another will be the criterion by which we are saved or damned. The emphasis is on our duty to one another, and an attention which looks to a time when the meaning of all history, and of the universe itself, will be revealed. The light of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor is the light which finally illuminates everything in creation, according to some Eastern Christian thinkers. A belief in the Last Days means that our lives are not lived against an indifferent backdrop, but that all creation is part of the same story of cosmic as well as individual transfiguration.

Moral, ethical, and social teaching take on a new urgency when the watchfulness Jesus speaks about is taken seriously. At the personal level, our response to Jesus' call for watchfulness is obviously central, and can move us away from a self-preoccupied morality. But there are other reasons for developing a non-fundamentalist theology of the Last Days. It may seem to put us into some embarrassing company, but we should take the long view: considering the place of this teaching in Christian history, and the words of Jesus himself, it puts us in some very good company as well. It should be undertaken precisely to redeem an essential ancient Christian doctrine from people who want to use it to justify everything from anti-Communist foreign policy to a suspicion of, God help us, poor King Juan Carlos.

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NO PLACE TO BE NEUTRAL

THE PLIGHT OF THE SUMU INDIANS

ANNE MANUEL

One of the most tragic aspects of Central America's wars has been the victimization of people who try to stay neutral; living their lives as they always have while their homes become battlegrounds. Often resisting intense pressure to choose sides, those who manage to remain neutral believe their best strategy for survival is to avoid making enemies. Yet by refusing to choose, they often win the suspicion and enmity of both sides.

Peasants and villagers in conflict-ridden areas of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, where guerrillas and soldiers demanding allegiance and assistance are a constant presence, know the finer points of this dilemma all too well. They have suffered acutely when they have chosen sides, and just as badly when they chose not to choose.

There are countless examples. In May 1987, five young Salvadoran men in San Miguel province succumbed to pressure from guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front to provide three days' worth of assistance. On their way home, the unarmed men were murdered by Salvadoran troops, who threw their bodies into a well. Protestant evangelical residents of El Mozote, El Salvador, apparently believed their neutrality and religion protected them from the ravages of that country's guerrilla war. But the Salvadoran army did not see it that way. In the course of a massive counterinsurgency operation in Morazan province in December 1981, troops entered El Mozote and massacred more than 480 residents, many of them women and children. Apparently they believed the residents supported the guerrillas. These days the army sometimes dresses in guerrilla garb while passing through villages, to see where residents' true sympathies lie.

In Guatemala, thousands of Indians were massacred as the government of General Efrain Rios Montt imposed its "guns and beans" counterinsurgency campaign in the countryside. An army officer quoted by Raymond Bonner in the *New York Times* described the prevailing military attitude towards peasants that lay at the heart of the guns and beans program: "If you are with us, we'll feed you; if not, we'll kill you." Because the guerrillas had succeeded in winning over some Indians to their cause, all Indians became subversives in the eyes of the Guatemalan military.

In Nicaragua and Honduras, this process of victimization threatens the survival of the Sumu Indians, an indigenous group which — with the exception of one small rebel band — has sought desperately to stay out of the conflict. In spite of this effort — in many cases *because* of it — Sumus have been kidnapped, forced to fight by both government and insurgent forces, tortured, and murdered. Their numbers reduced to less than 10,000, the Sumus now speak openly about their possible extinction. But such a tragedy could be avoided, if the Sandinistas and *contras* agree, in the spirit of the Arias plan, to allow the Sumus to return to their homes and patch up their broken lives in peace.

One little-noticed plank of the Arias plan commits Central American governments to "give urgent attention to the groups of refugees and displaced persons brought about by the regional crisis" and help those who want to return to their homes. The Sumus desperately need such attention and assistance. Having spent the last five years in flight from government and *contra* forces, the Sumus want to return home. Their effort has been thwarted by a lack of resources on the part of the Nicaraguan government, and by a campaign of terror by some *contra* forces.

The Sumus' troubles began in the late sixteenth-century, when the Spanish and British battled each other for control of the Americas. Seeking to shake Spain's grip on what is now Nicaragua and Honduras, the British armed the Atlantic coast Miskito Indians, crowned one of them the "Mosquito King," and urged them to attack Spanish settlements. In doing so, the British placed the Miskitos, with their new supplies of guns and machetes, in a position to tyrannize the other Atlantic coast Indians, who had only bows and arrows. Many Sumus were actually enslaved by the Miskitos and forced to participate in raids against the Spanish throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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The Miskitos cemented their domination of the coast through miscegenation with the dominant foreign culture, while the Sumus remained apart, their numbers dwindling as the Miskitos' swelled. Eventually, the Sumus fled up to the headwaters of the coastal rivers, where they lived in total isolation, their population continuing to diminish.

Long after the British were gone, the Miskitos dominated the Atlantic coast. The eastern Zelaya province did not formally become part of Nicaragua until 1894, but even afterwards, attracted little interest among the "Spanish" Nicaraguans of the West. The Somoza family, which ruled Nicaragua for forty-five years, also ignored the sparsely populated Atlantic coast and its Indians.

This state of more or less blissful ignorance by the authorities ended abruptly with the Sandinista revolution of 1979. The story of the alienation of the coast people by the revolutionaries is well known. It began with efforts to "incorporate" the coast, making its people appreciate a revolution they had nothing to do with. It peaked in February 1981, when the Sandinistas arrested most of the Indian communities' leaders who had announced audacious demands for Atlantic coast autonomy. Shortly after the arrests, the mercurial Miskito leader and former Somoza agent, Steadman Fagoth, formed the Indian *contra* force, Misura, as several thousand young Miskitos crossed the border into Honduras. Soon the CIA began training Miskito insurgents, according to former *Washington Post* correspondent Christopher Dickey.

A series of bloody battles between the Miskito insurgents and the Sandinistas rocked northern Zelaya, and by early 1982 the Sandinistas responded with the massive relocation of Indian communities from their traditional villages on the Rio Coco to resettlement camps in the interior.

The Sumus remained on the periphery of the Miskito-Sandinista conflict, as their principal community, Musuwas, was located over thirty miles south of the border which had become the scene of the constant confrontations. Yet both the government and the *contras* appeared determined to force the Sumus to choose sides.

Efforts by Sandinista militants to organize Sumu workers and propagandistic elements of the Sandinista literacy campaign damaged relations between the Sandinistas and the Sumus. But the most serious strain came from the drafting of young Sumu men. Sixty were inducted against their will in 1981; after a three-month training period in Puerto Cabezas, they were allowed to return to Musuwas.

The breaking point came in late June or early July 1982, when several hundred Sandinista soldiers occupied Musuwas, reportedly in an effort to re-recruit the sixty young Sumus. Witnesses say the troops stayed three days, confiscating everything of value, knocking coconuts out of trees with automatic weapons, and installing themselves in the church and schoolhouse. Thirty-two Sumus were rounded up and taken away by helicopter.

On the first day of the occupation, soldiers seized twenty-five-year-old Crecencio Tanacio (or Atanacio) and dragged him to the schoolhouse for questioning about his alleged involvement with Misura. Tanacio's interrogation began between 11:00 P.M. and midnight. By morning he was dead.

During the same occupation, soldiers are said to have killed another young Sumu man named Miguel Benjamin. The circumstances surrounding his death are unclear; some former Musuwas residents say he was shot trying to escape arrest. Other versions of these events hold the Sandinistas to blame for the killing of two Sumu women, Gloria Simion and Sindila Simion, up-river from Musuwas, as well as for the rape of two twelve-year-old girls.

Shortly after the Sandinistas had left Musuwas, Misura forces entered the settlement and murdered a Sumu youth, Rodolfo Jacobo Eran, claiming he was a Sandinista spy. Eran was said to travel frequently to the mining town Bonanza, which Misura considered grounds for suspicion.

But many Sumus say Eran was killed because, like most of the Sumus in Musuwas, he had resisted pressure to join Misura or seek refuge in Honduras. His crime was to remain neutral. A Sumu who had been in Misura's logistics section recalled the lesson Sumus were supposed to glean from Eran's fate. "They said they would kill us the same way they had killed Rodolfo," the Sumu told Donald Strome, Jr., a volunteer with the World Relief Corporation, "that if you stay in Nicaragua you're a Sandinista."

The combination of pressure from Misura and fear of the Sandinistas prompted almost 2,000 Sumus to flee to Honduras. Others hid for months in the mountains of Nicaragua. Still others were swept up in the Sandinistas' massive relocation.

In Honduras, the Sumus encountered as great, if not greater troubles than they had experienced in Nicaragua. Forced recruitment by Misura became a permanent fact of life both in Mocoron, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees camp that became their first stop in Honduras, and in Tapalwas, the all-Sumu camp where most of the refugees moved in January 1983. A Sumu who had been recruited by Misura described the situation to Strome, the World Relief worker:

> The Miskitos arrived in Tapalwas armed and carried away young men. Sometimes to complete their mission they took twenty, sometimes they took fifteen. They took them and they deserted. Then they took them again and again the Sumus deserted.

These forced recruitments terrorized the Sumus in Tapalwas. Several mass kidnappings were carried out by Ampino Palacios, a Sumu warrior allied with Adolfo Calero's Nicaraguan Democratic Front (FDN). On May 24, 1986, Palacios and his men kidnapped twenty-six Sumus from Tapalwas. Eight managed to escaped the first night, five remain unaccounted for, and the remainder were freed only after intense pressure from international relief and human rights organizations.

Once recruited, the Sumus were treated as dispensable and given the worst duties to fulfill, such as "walking point." If

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the enemy were encountered, the Sumus would be the first to fall. By the middle of 1984, more than twenty-five Sumus had been killed in the war against the Sandinistas, and the Sumu mortality rate was an extraordinary 21 percent.

Beginning in 1984, the Sumus began searching for ways to escape from the grip of Misura. Dozens of Sumus enlisted the help of UNHCR and the World Relief Corporation to relocate to a distant refugee camp called Nueva Musuwas. These efforts enraged the Misura leadership. Misura fighters captured Sumus seeking to move and threatened them with death. Donald Strome, who was facilitating the Sumus' relocation, was repeatedly threatened as well. With the protection of the Honduran military, however, dozens of Sumus eventually made the trip to relative safety.

Yet conditions were hard in refugee camps, and by 1985, the Sumus began to filter back into Nicaragua, aided by the UNHCR. By 1987, about half of the 1,800-2,000 Sumu refugees in Honduras had returned to Nicaragua.

But the return home did not protect the Sumus from *contra* forced recruitment. In February 1987, Palacios and his fellow *contra*, Nacilio Miguel, seized a group of fifteen Sumus just outside of Bonanza, Nicaragua, and took them to Honduras. The fifteen had recently repatriated to Nicaragua and were traveling back to their original village of Musuwas to clear the ground for planting when Palacios descended on them. (They still could not move back to Musuwas because of continued fighting in the area.) While three of the fifteen were allowed to flee to Tapalwas, the rest were taken to Palacios's remote armed camp in Walakitan, Honduras.

Some Sumus learned the hard way that *contra* death threats are not idle. In March 1987 Ampino Palacios and his men killed three young Sumus who refused to continue on a forced march into Honduras after being seized with a group of some thirty-five Sumus in Nicaragua. Palacios and two of his warriors, known as "*zebra*" and "*jardin*," were sentenced to seven-to-eight years in jail by a *contra* tribunal, according to the U.S.-funded Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights. But the sentencing had little impact. Palacios quickly "escaped" from confinement in Honduras and returned to his terror tactics. In early December, 1987, Palacios kidnapped six Sumus from Musuwas, forcing them to march with his troops to Honduras.

A December 20 sweep of the mining area of northern Zelaya province, hailed by the *contras* as their greatest military victory yet, further terrorized Sumus who had repatriated to Nicaragua. The *contras* attacked five Sumu communities — killing an infant and wounding six other Sumus — kidnapped fifty-eight others, and in Bonanza burned sheds where a group of Sumu lived.

Even the Honduran military had a hand in the persecution of Frank Lopez, a Sumu whose treatment typified the brutality the Sumus have experienced from all sides. Having helped out Steadman Fagoth in 1981, Lopez was arrested by Sandinista authorities late that year or early in 1982 and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. During his incarceration, Lopez was badly beaten and he still bears a scar on his head from the abuse, according to Gotz von Houwald, the former West German ambassador to Nicaragua, foremost expert on the Sumus and a friend of Lopez's. After three years, Lopez was released and moved to Honduras. Soon afterward, however, the Indian *contra* force Kisan (which had replaced Misura as Washington's favored Indian insurgent force) captured Lopez and turned him over to the Honduran army, with the improbable charge that he was a Sandinista spy.

In Honduras, Lopez was detained for weeks by the police intelligence section, the *Direccion Nacional de Investigacion*, where he was badly tortured, receiving electric shocks on his eyes. The DNI released Lopez after the president of the Honduran Bar Association's human rights commission interceded on his behalf.

The Nicaraguan war has shattered the Sumu way of life. Once living in thirty-two villages, the Sumus are now practically all housed in temporary camps: either the crowded and poorly supplied resettlement camps in Nicaragua or the equally destitute Honduran camps. The years of exile and forced relocation have devastated the Sumus' ethnic identity and cohesion. More dangerous still, they have brought a considerable drop in Sumu birth rates, prompting concern for the fragile group's survival. The Sumus' small number makes it difficult for them to survive being uprooted, forced to flee, and subjected to detention, torture, and murder. Other Atlantic coast Indian tribes such as the Kukra and the Prinzu were long ago overcome by such difficulties. Among the Sumus, there is a stoic sense of fatalism.

The fate of small indigenous peoples has often been toyed with by nations at war, from Southeast Asia to the Middle East. There is an opportunity now, with the Arias plan and the defeat of *contra* funds in the U.S. Congress, for the government and insurgents in Nicaragua to demonstrate their professed concern for the welfare of the people by allowing the Sumus to rebuild their lives, rather than forcing them to become casualties in a war they want no part of. It would be a breakthrough not only for the Sumus but for all the peoples of the region.

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HORTON FOOTE'S MANY ROADS HOME

AN AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT & HIS CHARACTERS

MARIAN BURKHART

I realized that Horton Foote is quite probably America's greatest playwright when, after seeing both *Lily Dale* and *The Widow Claire*, I stepped out onto streets deep in the bowels of Manhattan and found myself disoriented because I wasn't hearing people speak in the southern cadences of the Texas Gulf Coast. Foote's characters had so established themselves as real that it seemed people around me should have names like Sarah Nancy, Annie Gayle, Gladys Maude, or Irma Sue. Or should be speaking about "rent houses" instead of "income property," using "sweet" to express approval or sympathy, addressing their siblings as "brother" or "sister," practicing verbal courtesies like "ma'ams" and "sirs," and answering questions in complete sentences: "Yes, I am" and "No, I do not." Because Foote knows so well the people of his own region, he knows well the rest of America, a fact confirmed by the beautifully appropriate set for *Lily Dale*.

Looking down from the balcony, my Indiana husband and I found on the set pieces of furniture we knew from his western Pennsylvania grandmother's house and a table my Iowa stepmother had introduced into our Colorado home. Foote's plays generate an atmosphere so widely and intensely American it seems that even citizens for whom the West begins somewhere around the Hudson River could find in it something of themselves.

To recount this aspect of experiencing Foote is to stress the ordinariness of the artifacts and the speech he uses, for Foote's lifelong meditation upon what it means to be American focuses upon the ordinary. If American ideals mean anything, and if a government structured democratically is to accomplish anything, it should be a world in which the ordinary live well and achieve decent lives, providing indeed a seed-ground for the extraordinary, but only accidentally so. Extraordinary persons are to grace and benefit the rest of us, not make us irrelevant.

Foote's characters are people we know. Lily Dale is as neurotic as anyone—male or female—who appears in Tennessee Williams or Eugene O'Neill, but she is neurotic not flamboyantly, but as we experience neurotics to be. She is anyone's insufferable aunt, the pain-in-the-neck down anybody's street. The only difference is that Foote has elucidated the roots of her arrested development, her frightening need never to be anything other than narcissistic, and in doing so has done something to explain all those other aunts, too. For even if Foote's plays are based upon events in the life of his own family, his work turns outward to a world Americans know, an unexaggerated, uninflated world where most of us live.

This quality of ordinary American-ness accounts for much of Foote's charm, and it goes a long way to explain why he contributed with such distinction to television, but it does not of itself justify my conviction that he is great.

Perhaps one comes nearer to explaining his impact if one notes that for all its ordinariness, Foote's world is neither calm nor orderly. What serenity exists — and serenity is, in a sense, his subject — exists against a background of endless violence: economic dislocations that lead a man to murder the banker who foreclosed the mortgage on his farm, publicly, in front of the banker's daughter (*The Roads Home*); a man drunk enough to murder a cousin at a slight not to himself, but to the southern "tradition" of honoring womanhood — a southern good old boy simply does not allow even a whore to be called a whore to her face (*Cousins*); convict laborers murdering one another and being murdered by the plantation owner who exploits them (*Convicts*); physically based madness that leads to suicide; and a kind of madness that leads to violence, as Aristotle defined it

Amanda Plummer and Hallie Foote in "Courtship."

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— an interference with the natural, a perverse refusal to be or to allow others to be what they ought. Intelligent men of good family who drink themselves into irresponsible near-idiocy pepper Foote's plays, and a child, hungry for knowledge, is forbidden to read. Such perversion is systemic. Those murderers — except for the convicts — incur no punishment. If they are brought to trial at all, they suffer at most suspended sentences and walk away from the courtroom to swill again the bootleg liquor that leads to further violence.

But although Foote is aware that violence is as American as apple pie, violence, as such, is not his subject. In only the earliest of the twenty-odd plays I have read, *The Chase* (1948, 1952), is violence central to the action rather than the background against which what really matters takes place. And even in it, violence is undercut and discredited. The play, a commentary upon the American myth of the individual who achieves justice single-handedly through the courageous use of violence, is a gloss — conscious or not — upon one of the best embodiments of the myth, the film *High Noon*. Foote turns the premises of *High Noon* inside out in his play, in order to sever the connection between heroism and any kind of violence, even the justified violence of the film.

In *The Chase*, Hawes, the central character (again a sheriff endangered by a psychopath and compelled to stand against the townspeople who should support him) is admirable not because of his cool prowess under pressure, but because he wants very much *not* to kill the criminal but rather to return him to prison, as the law requires. He does shoot, but in a moment of panic; thus the action signals not success, but failure. Hawes redeems himself in the end, for he determines to try again to serve the law by helping someone else escape entrapment in violence. According to Foote, then, it is the unglamorous courage to persevere coupled with the undramatic courage to forego violence that begets the real hero.

But however valid and, in these days of Rambo and Ollie North, however necessary Foote's theme is, it does not yet constitute his greatness. Demythologizing western-movie violence, after all, merely begins to assess correctly what makes America succeed almost in spite of itself. I think Foote's awareness of Aristotelian violence, of the twisting of the natural, informs a play far greater — *A Trip to Bountiful*.

Carrie Watts and her son, Ludie, have been uprooted from the farm they loved, to live in Houston in a cramped apartment on a noisy, concrete-covered corner. The violence such dislocation imposes upon them is dramatized in Carrie's endless skirmishes with Jessie Mae, Ludie's appalling wife, who does not know that she is the victim of violence, too, for she is so wholly unaware of a world extending beyond her in either time or space or style that for her nothing really *is* except her whims.

Carrie's longed-for trip to Bountiful appears at first to lead merely to bitterness, for Bountiful is now a ghost town. But the land, freed long enough from the violence of misuse that twisted it to sterility, has renewed itself in its "ghostliness" and is green enough to give Carrie the bountiful gift of understanding the strength of her roots in this strong earth. It is an understanding that permits her to be again the woman she thought herself to be — someone large-souled enough to extricate herself from Jessie Mae's power-games, to be generous enough to turn aside from the pettiness such tactics have forced upon her.

Freeing herself, she frees Ludie, too, enabling him to accept his memories of a richer past, instead of turning away from them, embittered and as much entrapped as Jessie Mae in the narrowness of the present. She succeeds even in freeing Jessie Mae, at least enough to enable her daughter-in-law to take one small step outside her selfishness, a step so large that if any of us took a comparable one, we would have so far advanced in charity that we would, like Enoch, walk with God and be seen no more.

A Trip to Bountiful is one of many notable plays. *Tender Mercies* deserves the praise it has received, and *The Roads Home*, though not so well known, is equally well wrought. But what demonstrates most convincingly that Foote has an amplitude of vision that shapes itself into dramatically compelling plays and justifies the accolade I am giving him, is The Orphans' Home Cycle.

A series of nine plays based upon his father's life, the Cycle is Foote's most original, most profoundly unflinching consideration of how some of us manage to live in ordered decency in a world violently indecent. In these plays Foote's technique is at its most assured. Since he is concerned not with violence but with how people cope in response to violence, the most significant action is inward, not overt, and it is quite as often suggested as declared.

The longer speeches tend to come, usually comically, from the emptier heads, and there is as much between the lines as in the lines themselves, for what Foote has to say requires him to externalize inner action in a way consistent not only with the stage conventions of his time but with the character of the Americans who people his plays.

Foote's admirable characters have the language and the intelligence to speak well, but they are reticent. That they say little, that for the most part they listen and think is part of what makes them matter. They are not passive, nor are they stoics. For them, emotion is to be understood, to be mastered and channeled, not imposed upon those who do not share it. It is the Lily Dales and the Jessie Maes who tell everyone always what they feel because nothing they can admit to feeling is worth being reticent about.

The reticence of these characters means that when they do speak, what they say is wrenchingly moving. Witness Horace Robedeaux's *cri de coeur* to Elizabeth in *On Valentine's Day*, the sixth play of the Cycle, an outburst that almost tears from his soul the envy, of which he is ashamed, for those who are successful, for those who have been parented. The exchange reaches its climax when he tells of his dreams — once almost hopeless — but which he can realize now because of Eliz-

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Grove Press plans to publish all nine plays in *The Orphans' Home Cycle*. So far, only the three plays shown on PBS's American Playhouse—*Courtship*, *On Valentine's Day*, and *1918*—are in print, plus an acting edition of *Lily Dale*. An early version of *Roots in a Parched Ground* is in *Three Plays* (Harcourt, Brace, 1962). I am indebted to Walt Bode from Grove and to Horton Foote for allowing me to read the unpublished plays from drafts. M.B.

abeth's love, a love which fills him with awe: "I adore you, I worship you . . . and I thank you for marrying me."

The demythologizing Foote began in *The Chase* goes on in the Cycle, as it did, for that matter, in *A Trip to Bountiful*. There is serious scrubbing of the idyllic picture of our small-town past. Life from 1902 to 1928, the years the Cycle covers, involved twelve-hour working days sometimes for children nine- or ten-years-old, since fathers made a habit of dying young. The social dislocations of the Civil War were in Texas neither forgotten nor resolved. Convicts — usually black — replaced slaves as plantation laborers. Poverty, coupled with the anti-intellectualism that is as American as violence, made education past the fourth or fifth grades a luxury. The surest means of spreading prosperity was the wartime boom that guaranteed high prices for cotton, but when prices fell or the crop failed, there was no social mechanism to protect the victims. Yet the rugged individualist — the Horatio Algers, for whom pluck makes luck and anyone who works hard can succeed — remained so much an ideal that the poor had to suffer the further pain of being seen, and sometimes seeing themselves, to be at fault.

The mythic figure particularly subject to debunking in the Cycle is the southern "good old boy," rough and ready, governed more by a sort of frontier chivalry than by the law, a free spirit who finds his strength in whiskey, the good, clear liquor from the old brown jug, central — as in Faulkner's "The Bear" — to the male ritual of telling hunting tales and finding therein the courage to hunt again. Around Harrison, Texas, the center of Foote's personal Yoknapatawpha County, such men are unmitigated disasters who ruin their families, waste their fortunes, kill others, and addle their brains, and there is no solution for this rampant alcoholism other than the Keeley Cure, the inefficacy of which is a thread running wryly through Foote's tapestry.

Courtship, the play central in the Cycle, reveals most effectively the themes central to that tapestry. The fifth play of the nine, it is also the turning point of Horace Robedeaux's story; when Elizabeth Vaughn agrees to marry him, he has for the first time since early childhood the possibility of a home. The play opens up Foote's world and makes clear his central preoccupation: When so much in human nature seems to relish chaos, how do some people succeed in achieving lives orderly enough to permit a civilized society to exist? In Foote's eyes the odds against such a society are high indeed. Not only must we not obey that in us to which violence appeals. We need as well to choose to live in spite of the fears chaos inspires.

The play's action is deceptively simple. Elizabeth Vaughn decides to marry Horace Robedeaux, though her family has good reason to frown upon him as a suitor. He is a traveling salesman — a profession proverbially practiced by the unstable. He has lived on his own since he was twelve, when his father died "of too much liquor and too many cigarettes." The only moral support he regularly receives is from the aunt who gives him Sunday dinners, but who has also — and in Mr. Vaughn's view, alas — taught him to dance. That is little with which to counter not only his heritage, but the influence of his uncle, who not only drinks and smokes but is a compulsive gambler as well. What is to keep Horace from drinking and drifting with his usually shiftless peers?

The Vaughns live with civility in a gracious house. They are part of a community; not just their fellow non-dancing Methodists, but everyone in town respects Henry Vaughn. Both Elizabeth and her sister Laura, home for vacation from boarding school, are well-dressed. Their manners are meticulous, so much so that Elizabeth makes sharply clear how angry she is with her parents merely by failing to call her mother "ma'am." Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn are happily married, yet the emotion almost palpably underlying all this order is fear, for Mr. Vaughn knows no way to protect the daughters he loves except by shutting them away from the violence he is too perceptive to ignore.

His reasons for seeing his family as an island of order in a sea of chaos are made clear through the play's wholly realistic dialogue — principally between Elizabeth and Laura, as they catch up on the year's news and try to see what lies outside the haven their father has taken such pains to build for them. They've heard whispers about Uncle Billy Vaughn and his two no-good wives, the second of whom, Aunt Asa, shocked family and neighbors by being clearly drunk as Billy lay on his deathbed. That danger threatens their own generation they know because Sybil Thomas, six months pregnant, has just had a shotgun wedding. They themselves are vulnerable. They, like Sybil, "slip out" because they are allowed only rarely to date. And Elizabeth would be a widow now had she succeeded in running away with Syd Joplin, her first love, since the wildness she found attractive has already killed him.

Mr. Vaughn's haven is also a prison because he has found life ungovernable in other ways, too. Caution can be useless: Aunt Lucy, having married an older man not for love but for security, found herself at thirty-two a widow with four children.

Thus, Mr. Vaughn feels compelled to subject his daughters to Aristotelian violence. He forbids them to dance because it is the most seductive of the steps that lead to marriage, or worse, to involvement with the risks life entails. The themes mesh when the dance that is the play's counterfoil to Mr. Vaughn's attempts to guard his daughters ends abruptly. Sybil Thomas, who once danced with her seducer, has gone unexpectedly into

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labor to bring forth a dead child and has herself met death — the expected end to any dance in Mr. Vaughn's view.

Elizabeth is quiet and preoccupied, except when she protests vehemently her parents' attempts to thwart their children's natural desires. Horace has given her a ring she wears hidden on a chain, and she must decide whether or not she really loves him. As her parents turn away, persuaded that they have taken the steps necessary to end the affair, she says to herself, "I'm marrying Horace Robedeaux . . . if he asks me."

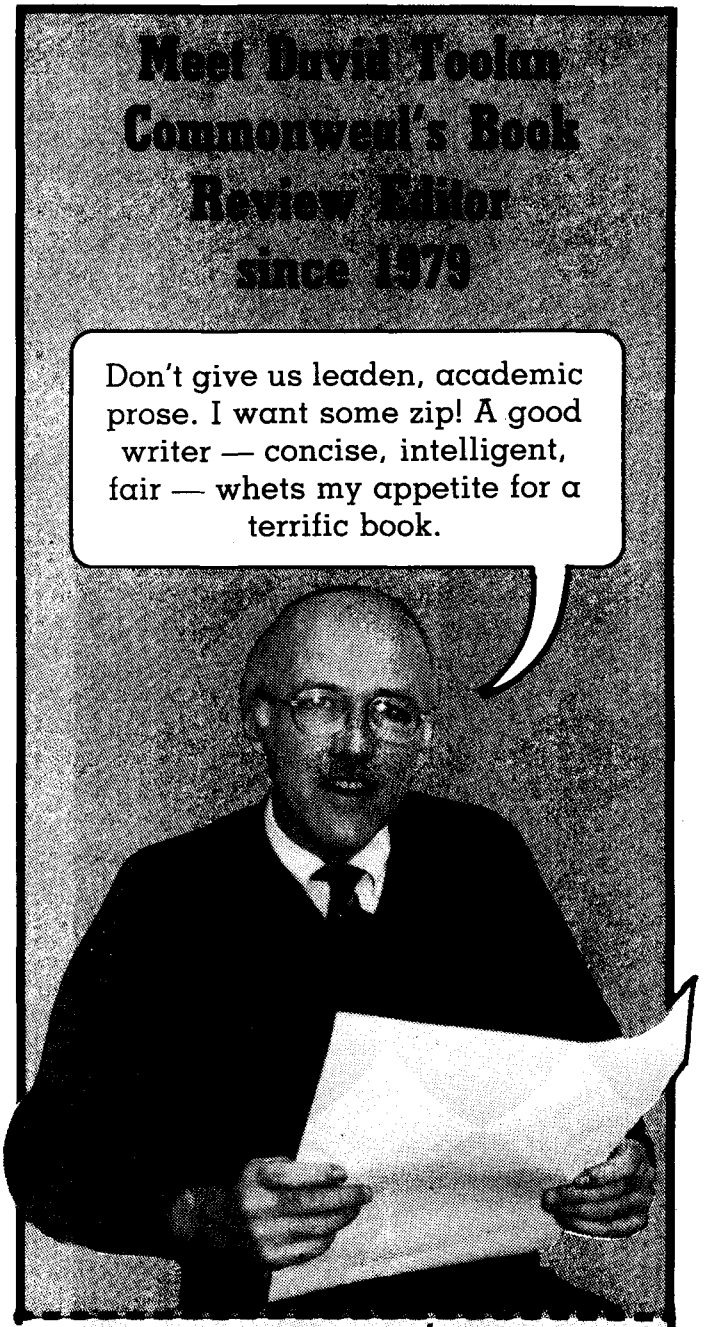
How does she decide? What permits her not to rebel but to choose? On this night when almost every word, every memory is of sadness or of tragedy or of mistakes, when the principal event is Sybil's pathetic death, how can Elizabeth know not only that she loves Horace but that he is worthy of her love? There is no reason, yet in complete confidence and with absolute serenity she knows, and she is right.

How, for that matter, has Horace become a man whom Elizabeth is right to trust? In the Cycle's first play, *Roots in a Parched Ground*, Horace suffers at twelve total abandonment when his father dies and his mother immediately remarries. He descends into hell in *Convicts*, in which, now thirteen, he is compelled on Christmas Eve to watch his vicious employer die in a fit of *delirium tremens* and is cheated of the $11.50 he has worked six months to earn. In *Lily Dale* his attempt to return to his natural place as his mother's son and his sister's brother ends when he learns that only her fear that he, too, will die allows Lily Dale for a few moments to share their common past. Sadder still, Horace realizes that his mother will never permit her affection for him to upset the new husband (who hates her son) to whom she gives her highest praise: he has no bad habits. How is it that in *The Widow Claire* Horace is at twenty-one his own man? He drinks, but does not get drunk. He gambles, but one dollar only, and nothing can keep him from going the next day to Houston for a six-week business course that may help him order his life.

If one recognizes that religion is a matter not of answers but of awe, one can see, in what way Foote is religious. Foote, like Horace when he thinks of Elizabeth, is in awe before the mystery of human goodness.

Brother Vaughn drinks because he cannot in his own eyes measure up to his father; Pete Davenport, Horace's stepfather, is narrow, joyless, and ungenerous because, fatherless from the age of eight, he has found life to be narrow, joyless, and ungenerous. Horace's mother sees virtue as preeminently a lack of bad habits because in her first marriage she suffered so much from the presence of bad habits. Inadequacies we can in part understand. But how did Horace, who suffered more and received less than any other of the Cycle's principal characters, find his way to compassion, to joy, to generosity? Why is he scrupulously honest when in his need as a child he was cheated and cheated again?

To these questions there is no answer. He just is, as Elizabeth just knew and just chose. Their goodness, their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Larry Rubin

Harrisburg, Mon Amour (Three-Mile Island)

Dissecting the seed, we split infinity,
Vaporizing time for those beneath
The cloud. Layers of peeling atoms smashed
Into the cells and scorched the flowers of flesh
Forever. Who knew the flowers were ours?
Here was Hiroshima, Lord, and look—
Pennsylvania stands. Yet somewhere
On the golden Susquehanna flesh
Is pulsing to a new refrain, electrons
Ripping from the children's cells, blood
Counts more important now than stars
Of gold from Sunday School, than molten domes.

Michael Cadnum

Ghost

There is a note under your door.
Your old rival will meet
you at dawn: snow.
A creek where water
seeps through the stones.
The bullet opens a hand

inside you. You die.
Your ghost fills the woods
like cold.

One morning you are reborn.
Your new childhood
is far away, in a white house.
You forget
everything, and learn grief again,
a language made of water,

carrying your old life, and the
lives before that in your
ignorance, like the oxygen
in the tunnel of each hair.

Paul Petrie

Memory's End

Memory fails the dead.
It is we who must remember
what they in their thrifty beds
forget, forget forever.

Memory fails the live.
It leaks from our minds like water.
Dear Ghost, neither live nor dead,
bear in mind this world, remember!

John Fandel

Endangered Species

It happened to
Xerces Blue;
It could to you,

When Man's defense
Need be Immense
Brains Minus Sense.

If butterfly
And whale go by,
Will you and I

Have staying power,
Threatened by our
Own kind, and flower?

Have we a chance?
Reconnaissance,
Or renaissance?

John Fandel

Incident at Damascus, Ark.

Silos used to be for wheat for bread.
Now they store warheads to make more dead wardead.

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wisdom, remain a mystery. We can answer, of course, the grace of God, but if we have any understanding at all of what those words mean, we ought to realize that they merely restate the mystery theologically. We ought to realize, too, the magnitude of Horton Foote's achievement. In choosing to praise such gentle heroes, to give them the fame that is their due, Foote has assessed American character, American myth, and the American ambience more accurately than has just about any other figure in the American theater.

SCREEN

THE YEAR THAT WAS

SEVEN WORTH THE PRICE

Five hundred and eleven films were released in 1987; the year's box office earnings added up to $4.2 billion. These record numbers reflect two different forms of inflation: one, the dollar kind in the form of a new $7 ticket price in some major cities; the other, inflated productivity among film studios and independents.

Ironically, the effect of the so-called video revolution—at least so far—has not been to depress filmmaking, but to inspire the industry with the idea that almost any movie can find some sort of market, be it first-run theater, television, or video. The results are mixed: the "ancillary" markets sometimes mean that a "quality" (or what used to be called an "art" film) can survive a weak first run and have a second life on videotape. The same market also insures long life for craven X-rated gore. Exploitation filmmakers follow the Gospel of Barnum ("No one ever went broke underestimating the bad taste of the American public."); their technology recapitulates his vulgarity.

Of these 511 films, who could see them all? Who would want to? The largest newspapers must employ two to three full-time critics to survey the deluge. After mentally arresting the usual suspects—sequels in the *Friday the Thirteenth/ Nightmare on Elm Street* vein—that still leaves an average of several films released each week, most of them adorned with colorful hyperbole from at least two to three reviewers who have cozied up to them, via studio courtesy, long in advance. But after seeing the film, one understands that it is not just prices or productivity that are currently undergoing inflation.

Inflation or no, 1987 did provide some excellent films. In the gap between the first awards in January (conferred by the New York Film Critics, the National Board of Review, and other highbrow groups) and the Oscar awards in March, it might be useful to list a few and note their significance. Here is a seven-best list, curtailed not in the curmudgeonly belief that ten good films could not be found, but in deference to the plain fact that readers might want to nominate some of the 511 that this reviewer missed (e.g. *Moonstruck*, which I am told is fun on its own terms; *Nuts*, which I boycotted on the principle that some egos need no encouragement; *Ironweed*, whose preview fell on a cold and rainy night, and, after falling on cold and rainy criticism, didn't seem worth $7; reviewers too employ that apt new excuse, "I can always see it on video").

My list involves no special courage; the films have already been honored, and will probably get more awards. But, according to Dr. Johnson, things worth saying once are worth saying twice; so here goes. Despite their flaws, *The Last Emperor*, *Hope and Glory*, and *My Life as a Dog* seemed to me the best films of the year. Behind them come *Matewan*, *I Heard the Mermaids Singing* (still showing in cities like Boston and Washington, freed from the deadly indifference of New York critics), *Dark Eyes*, and *The Dead*. Some sort of special category has to exist for *Fatal Attraction*, which, despite its manipulativeness, I found compelling as a reflection of the fact—forgotten in the hoopla over its sexual politics—that some women are capable of evil.

Except for *Fatal Attraction*, each of these films was made independent of a major Hollywood studio. Columbia distributed *The Last Emperor* and *Hope and Glory*; for this and other acts of good taste, the English producer of *Chariots of Fire*, David Putnam, who chaired Columbia, has been dismissed. At March's Oscar awards Hollywood, no doubt, will once again honor a good number of films that it refuses to invest in.

Aside from ticket pricing and hyperproductivity, this is the most interesting trend of 1987—not the existence of "quality" films, but their increased popularity within an industry that lacks the courage to make them. TOM O'BRIEN

STAGE

DIMINISHED CLASSICS

'CHERRY ORCHARD' & 'DREAM'

In *The Shifting Point*, Peter Brook differentiates between a "directorial conception," which is imposed from the outside, and a "sense of direction," a process of discovery: "form is not ideas imposed on a play, it is the play illuminated." Brook watchers know that the process may cause the play (opera) to be cut and its surface transformed *(The Tragedy of Carmen)* or to be moved into a space that the dramatist could never have conceived (the gymnastic *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), but the enormity of such changes does not invalidate Brook's point; plays can be illuminated by the most unlikely lights.

For Chekhov enthusiasts there was great promise in Brook's gathering an elegant group of performers to do *The Cherry Orchard*, but the production seems formless, short on illumination. The BAM Majestic, which set off *The Mahabharata* so well, proved uncongenial to Chekhov. The performers rattled around the immense playing area, unanchored in place or time. Even if we accept that the play is about dispersion (it begins with an arrival, ends in departure), the many entrances and exits that Chekhov calls for need not be turned into

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mini-journeys into the far reaches of the theater. The houses in Chekhov are enclosures. Even when the characters go outside—the estate park and the croquet lawns in *The Sea Gull,* the garden in *The Three Sisters,* the meadow in *The Cherry Orchard*—they are still trapped in their society and in themselves. Tightness is all. There is so much space in the Majestic, such openness, such color (in the rugs that Brook is so fond of) that the characters cannot help appearing to float free unless the actors can impose narrowness on the vastness. They fail to do so here.

Chekhov's characters are in business for themselves, none of them capable of giving more than glancing attention to the others, but they are apart together, bound by love, affection, habit. I had no sense of such a "group" at the Majestic—not even a disintegrating group.

In one important instance, Natasha Perry as Mme. Ranevskaya, the playing is simply confusing. This is not the woman I know from Chekhov's text, soft and self-indulgent, dangerously helpless yet tough enough to survive pain and loss. There is no reason why Parry should play my Lyubov, but the play needs someone's Lyubov at its center. Hers never takes shape for me. Erland Josephson is the only principal who has his character (Gaev) in hand. But even in Josephson's case his collapsing speeches sometimes fail to suggest Gaev's vagueness and suggest instead a performer whose words are being eaten by space itself. It is significant that the performances I most admired were of peripheral characters—Mike Nussbaum's Pishchik and Linda Hunt's Charlotta.

A single scene can indicate how Brook's journey of discovery takes an unlikely turn—the marvelous final moment of Act III when Lopakhin, a little drunk and very excited, at once sorry and triumphant, returns to announce that he has bought the cherry orchard. Parry's Lyubov reacts to his news by clutching herself as though her pain were physical, bending in an odd curve to one side and, as Chekhov's stage direction suggests, catching the furniture to keep from falling. She holds the pose too long. It becomes a gesture out of nineteenth-century melodrama. Lyubov is certainly capable of self-dramatization, but at this point her distress must be real if Lopakhin is to have anything to play against. Following her cue, he goes for melodrama himself. Brian Dennehy, whose gently abrasive Lopakhin has been interesting up to this point, throws himself full-length at Parry's feet. Lopakhin may be in love with Lyubov (at least with the memory of the young girl who bathed the bleeding nose of the "little peasant") and he may regret that she did not let him save the estate for her, but he is far too aware of the distance he has come to prostrate himself as though he were his grandfather, the serf. It makes a hash of the scene and smashes the complexity of Lopakhin's reaction to what he has done.

Of the major modern dramatists, Chekhov is the one who most delights and distresses me. His plays are beautifully realized on the page, but except for the Michael Redgrave-Laurence Olivier *Uncle Vanya,* which I saw on television not on the Chichester stage, no production has ever been completely satisfying. Usually, one settles for bits, hints, suggestions of the whole. Hope springs eternal for the Chekhov lover, but Brook's *Cherry Orchard* dampens that hope, offers only fragments of consolation.

"In our century, when the director has taken on a much greater role in interpreting and guiding a play," say Joseph Papp and Elizabeth Kirkland in *Shakespeare Alive!,* "there are as many different approaches to Shakespeare's work as there are people to think them up." A.J. Antoon is presumably the thinker-up for *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the first in the Shakespeare Marathon that promises to present the complete canon at Papp's Public Theater.

Antoon's production is a perfect case of Brook's "directorial conception" in action. One can imagine the Publickers brainstorming: wouldn't it be interesting (and an excuse to use some good black performers) to move *Dream* to Bahia at the turn of the century and convert "the tiny sweet playful fairies," as *Shakespeare Alive!* calls them, into followers of *Umbanda,* a cult that, according to Antoon's program note, still flourished in the forests at the time? It is difficult, as Antoon discovered, to make the exotic transplantation grow in Shakespeare's English ground.

The play opens when tall and handsome Patty Holley, as Hippolyta, oozes onto the stage in a provocative net gown, sinks down, hoists a leg up across the other knee and contemplates her bare foot with mild disinterest. Clearly a hot night in Bahia. So send in Theseus in planter's white to remind this lazy tigress that "our nuptial hour/Draws on apace." Bahia and Shakespeare are already beginning to pull apart. There are Shakespeare scholars who will admit that the original has built-in disconnections of its own, that the young-lovers' plot, the fairy tale, and the rude mechanicals fit uncomfortably in the same play. They certainly do in this production. I am imperfectly informed about the rituals of *Umbanda,* but that makes little difference for these fairies, in the dances Garth Fagan has designed for them, are straight out of Hollywood's version of Rio at carnival time. The lovers act like kids at recess, all push, pull, punch, poke; even when a pair of them comes together, their joining is all straight lines, no curves—kisses and hugs without tenderness. Elizabeth McGovern, as an exasperated Helena, does well by her venomous lines, but for the most part the verbal exchanges are as lost as the lovers. The rude mechanicals, whom Antoon describes as "a group of native Brazilian workmen," are more Bronx than Bahia, and they make their scenes at once cute and leaden.

Some of the Shakespeare transformations under the Papp imprimatur—the 1972 rock version of *Two Gentlemen from Verona,* for instance—had a kind of integrity of their own, whatever they did to Shakespeare. But this *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is simply a patchwork. By the end, when all the plots merge in a high-energy revel, the production does stir up its own sense of fun. Still, it brings less illumination to *Dream* than Moonshine's lantern does *Pyramus and Thisbe,* and I doubt that Jorge Amado would recognize this Bahia.

GERALD WEALES

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The bishops & their critics

WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN &
RICHARD MADSEN

In the several years of its evolution from the first to the final draft, *Economic Justice For All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* has been, probably to a unique degree, both an ecclesial and a public document. Together with the earlier pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace*, the economic letter, in the consultative process of its composition and in its substance, marks the definitive entry of Catholicism into the center of American public life. The new level of engagement between the church and the wider community of public discourse is very likely to have permanent effects on both parties. The bishops have sparked intense debate within the Catholic church, within other religious bodies, and in American society more broadly. The books under review amply demonstrate the range of the debate. While strongly suggesting that the bishops' thinking, and Catholic social thought generally, will have to take more account than they did only a few years ago, critics and respondents have provided valuable new resources and possibilities for enriching the dialogue the bishops began.

Appropriately, but perhaps surprisingly, the most rhetorically powerful and intellectually vigorous debates engendered by the pastoral have been theological and philosophical rather than economic and political. As the debate over the pastoral reached beyond church circles to the world of secular intellectuals and activists, one might have expected that discussion of the pastoral would revolve less around the theologically grounded visions of moral ends proclaimed by the bishops and more around the social science grounding for the political and economic policies tentatively recommended by the bishops to achieve those ends. There has been a great deal of such discussion, but most of it has been predictable and inconclusive.

Thus representatives of the AFL-CIO, Thomas R. Donahue and Rudolph A. Oswald, in the collection edited by Thomas Gannon, S.J., contend that the bishops are right to advocate minimum wage guarantees and that a minimum wage brings neither widespread inflation nor massive unemployment. In the same volume Milton Friedman argues that a minimum wage cuts off job opportunities to many of the unemployed people the bishops would most like to help. Such debates have been a part of the American political landscape for a long time and will doubtlessly continue for so long as economics remains an inexact science and so long as there are contending interests between management and labor.

The pastoral does not seem to have occasioned much of a change in the quantity and quality of such economic and political policy debates. But it is stimulating something much more important — a new, widespread, and penetrating discussion of some basic American assumptions. These assumptions concern such matters as the relationship between the individual and society, the ultimate purposes of technological development, the relation between personal religious beliefs, moral convictions, social institutions, and the nature of human community. Issues such as these cannot be resolved by social scientific research, but only through dialogue about the roots of our philosophic and religious traditions. Thus the pastoral has led non-Catholic economists like Friedman to explicate the philosophical and even theological roots of their positions.

After undertaking an economic analysis of the policies advocated by the bishops (and predictably finding those policies self-defeating) Friedman, in the conclusion of his contributions to the Gannon volume, launches into a discussion of the pastoral's "collectivist moral vision," which he finds "repellent." He objects to the bishops' statements that "a country . . . has a moral obligation," "society has a duty," and so forth. In his view, the problem with such parlance is that it assumes that society has a reality that transcends the individuals who make it up. He advocates a moral view "that suggests something wholly different:

WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN *is professor of philosophy at La Salle University.*

RICHARD MADSEN *is professor of sociology at the University of California at San Diego.*

Sullivan and Madsen are co-authors of Habits of the Heart *(University of California Press).*

The Pastoral's Critics

The U.S. Bishops and Their Critics, *Walter Block, Fraser Institute, Vancouver, 1986, 1,226 pp.*

The Deeper Meaning of Economic Life, *R. Bruce Douglass, ed., Georgetown University Press, 1986, 233 pp.*

The Catholic Challenge to the American Economy, *Thomas M. Gannon, S.J., ed., Macmillan, 1987, 296 pp.*

The Pastoral on the Economy, *John Langan, S.J., ed.,* Theological Studies, *1987, pp. 125-156*

God, Goods, and the Common Good, *Charles P. Lutz, ed., Augsburg, 1987, 172 pp.*

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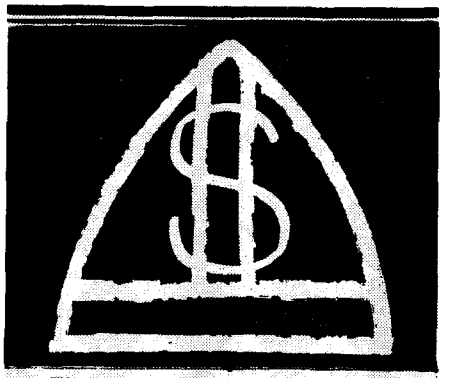
that a 'country' or a 'society' is a collection of individuals; that the basic entity is the individual or, more fundamentally, the family, and that only individuals can have moral obligations. According to this view, a building cannot have a moral obligation, a 'country' cannot have a moral obligation, and a 'society' cannot have a duty. . . . Those who hold this view do not want to see the country or the society or the government viewed as an organismic entity with moral obligations in and of itself."

If one holds to this individualistic understanding of society, one will indeed have difficulty, as do Friedman and many other critics, accepting the idea of "economic rights" central to the pastoral. The political rights familiar to all Americans are rights that establish the individual's freedom from demands imposed by others. Economic rights, however, would establish the basis for making claims upon others. As Friedman puts it, "If person A has the right to have food, then person B somewhere else must have an obligation to grow the food and provide it—the relation is one of master and slave, not mutual freedom." Friedman's understanding of the relationship between the self and society and his thinking about human rights echo the dominant moral language of American culture, the language of individualism. He is right to see the bishop's thinking as a fundamental challenge to that language. The virtue of his lucid critique of the pastoral—and of many others in the same vein—is to make explicit the differences between traditional Catholic understandings of the self and society and dominant American understandings, and to enable a genuine debate about these differences to be carried on.

The pastoral has stimulated a related philosophical and theological debate around the emphasis on the distribution rather than the production of economic goods. Many critics fear that the specific kinds of policies advocated by the bishops will seriously harm the productivity of the American economy; for example, full employment through government creation of jobs, an increase in the minimum wage, constraints on factory closings, progressive taxation that redistributes resources from the rich to the poor.

Quoting from a statement by the "Business Roundtable," James E. Burke, chairman of the board of Johnson and Johnson, emphasizes in his contribution to the Gannon volume the importance of the "relative ease of job destruction" to job creation. "European manpower adjustment policies and other labor market rigidities, including the high cost of employment relative to other production factors, curtail employment growth in economic upswings and impede the growth of new business by making it very difficult— and in some cases, almost impossible—to lay off workers in economic downturns." An emphasis on full employment would therefore discourage what the Business Roundtable calls the "beneficial churning" through which old firms are replaced by new firms in response to technological innovation. Full employment would inhibit progress toward ever greater efficiency in a dynamic economy.



This is one in a series of articles appearing in *Commonweal* that examines different aspects of the U.S. bishops' pastoral.

The economist Carl F. Christ, also writing in the Gannon volume, expresses the often heard worry that "the more progressive a tax system is, the greater the risk it will discourage productive activity." Manuel G. Velasquez, a philosopher specializing in business ethics, raises these economic concerns to a theological level when he writes of an "absence of an adequate treatment of economic productivity" in the pastoral. "An understanding of productivity would have enabled the bishops to analyze in depth the positive aspects of the American economy. It would also have led them naturally to a discussion of a spirituality for the modern corporate members, a spirituality that could enable the corporate member to find meaning and hope in the corporate tasks with which the working day is filled. The bishops failed to face either of these issues."

Behind such concerns is the question of the relation of the Catholic tradition to the modern project and its commitment to unlimited economic growth and technological innovation as the primary goal of human activity. From Max Weber on, social scientists have noted the tendency of Catholicism to resist the components of the modern project, to be too concerned about the destruction of traditional community loyalities, too suspicious of the hubris engendered by technological innovation and too skeptical of the value of material success to sustain modern rationalized economic development. Can the Catholic tradition be understood to warn against the dehumanizing pitfalls of economic and technological progress at the same time as it positively affirms and supports such progress for human ends?

These issues are argued by a group of respondents who question the adequacy of the bishops' linking of social analysis to their moral stance. A number of critics stress, as John Langan puts it in his sharp and helpfully critical review of this literature, that the bishops must learn "to think more consistently in structural terms." One such friendly critic, sociologist Norman Birnbaum, writes in the Gannon volume that the bishops' moral appeals to change persons and institutions underestimate "the accumulated historicity of institutions, the ways in which these capture or predetermine moral socialization" to reproduce the very attitudes the bishops seek to change. Or, as European Christian Democrat Kurt Biedenkopf

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puts it in the same volume, the "ordering of institutions, like ideas, has consequences," so that in social life "virtue" and "institutional arrangements" are interdependent and "should be the centerpiece of any effort to apply Catholic social thinking to modern industrial democracy." Biedenkopf thinks that the Simon-Novak letter provides a more consistent effort in this direction than does the bishops'.

The disjunction between moral norms and the directing institutions of modern life involves a long-standing argument among social and political theorists: has the differentiation of basic outlooks and norms affected by modern specialization advanced beyond a point where a coherent moral outlook encompassing the complexity of our societies is even possible. In this vein, Birnbaum, while stressing interdependence among modern institutions, underscores the thinness of American moral consensus to which the bishops can appeal. Robert Benne, a Lutheran scholar writing in the Lutz collection, faults the bishops for not recognizing the great diversity of economic arrangements that might be justified on a broadly Christian moral basis. For Benne, efficiency and productivity, the technical standards of the market, are nonmoral as such, and ought to be sharply differentiated from discussion of moral and political questions. The churches, claims Benne, are best at "providing a gracious context for bringing together groups and interests with divergent points of view and facilitating their conversation."

Relating moral norms to social analysis should become an explicit and central theme of the debate the pastoral has touched off. Once beyond the naive, positivist fundamentalism which claims that discussion of value and fact must be kept methodologically separate, the complex truth is that normative and analytical discussion interpenetrate. A number of critics illustrate this by questioning the consistency of the bishops' purpose in a way tied to the "preferential option for the poor." Are the bishops attempting to commend a communal, nonmaterialistic form of life or are they principally identifying Christian social ideals with more egalitarian distributions of goods and opportunities? If the latter, given the nature of modern capitalist societies, then are not these new opportunities likely to expand the hold of materialism on the formerly poor, thus compounding the problem of moral unresponsiveness the letter sets out to address?

The collection edited by R. Bruce Douglass provides some promising efforts to clarify these issues by tracing the conflicts among the letter's aims to the theological and philosophical traditions on which the bishops and their staff drew. The biblical theology of justice so important to both the "option for the poor" and for many liberation theologians stresses distribution as the great test of communal righteousness. However, as Henry Briefs notes, the common good tradition, which has served as the moral basis for modern Catholic social teaching, stresses social justice as participation. The tradition balances concern about distribution with concern for collective betterment. And it addresses the productivity argument, since with modern technology, resources are not simply given but can be developed.

Placing the letter in the context of twentieth-century efforts to relate Christian faith to modern economics brings the bishops into an even wider and historically richer conversation. That conversation includes liberation theology, as Anthony Tambasco shows; the "common good" tradition explained by R. Bruce Douglass; and the Protestant Social Gospel's "Kingdom Theology," developed by Diane Yeager. (In it she mounts a criticism of the common good tradition's dilution of Christian content which she finds implicit in its appeal to secular reason.) These critics help clarify the several strands of moral and political reflection that must continue to animate discussion of the appropriate Christian perspective on issues in the modern economy.

The pastoral, then, is emphatically on the side of greater participation, responsibility, and integration in modern eco-

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nomic life. The moral traditions on which the letter draws all emphasize these goods as against the competition and fragmentation which seem endemic to the advance of modernity. The strongest point of the bishops' effort is their unequivocal argument that the patterns of our social life are essential concerns of Christian spirituality, that discipleship mandates critical citizenship. What the critics put into relief is not just the incompleteness of the pastoral's efforts at analysis, but the theological, philosophical, and social science issues that ought to define future investigation and argument.

A final debate inspired by the bishops' pastoral centers on what might be called nationalist and internationalist visions of global human community. The bishops stress that their preferential option for the poor is meant to apply to the poor not just in the United States, but all around the globe, especially to the poorest of the poor in the third world. Practically all their commentators agree that economic issues have to be addressed in an international context. But they disagree on what is perhaps the thorniest economic issue facing our society: How compelling are the moral demands of global human solidarity? Are these demands strong enough to require that the United States adopt international economic policies that would lead to an improvement in living conditions in the third world at the expense of a lower standard of living in this country?

Many of the critics of the bishops, even those who are sympathetic, instinctively see the international system as an arena of competition between nation states rather than as a single human community. They affirm the need for free trade, but are concerned that it be done on a "level playing field." They assume that it would be politically unfeasible and perhaps morally wrong to enact policies that would dull the "competitive edge" of this country and lead to a lower standard of living in the United States. Others argue that more generous provision of foreign aid by rich countries will go into the coffers of oppressive governments rather than into the communities of the poor.

For still others the major question is whether the problems of the third world are due to exploitation by rich industrial nations or, as Walter Block of the Fraser Institute puts it in his book, due to sloth and disorganization? Conservatives like Block who suggest, in more or less euphemistic terminology, that the cause is sloth and disorganization, then make a case for ignoring many of the demands of third-world leaders. On the other hand, dependency theorists who claim that the cause is exploitation sometimes make a case for international class struggle against imperialistic capitalism. These visions, whether of the left or the right, conceive the world as an arena of competition based on a bitter legacy of conflict.

To what extent can Catholicism offer a vision of international solidarity strong enough and convincing enough to motivate efforts to overcome this legacy? This is the question which the dialogue the bishops have begun must confront and seek creatively to answer. Nearly a century since Leo XIII's opening toward the modern world and the social question, the American bishops have opened wide the door of dialogue. And though Pope Leo's current successor did not develop the point during his recent American visit, the bishops' teaching has already earned the highest commendation of a democratic society: the pastoral has become an important voice in the public argument.

BOOKS

An icy dip in the real world

THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES

Tom Wolfe

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $19.95, 659 pp.

Paul Baumann

Whaddaya whaddaya? Only one thing stands between thirty-eight-year-old Wall Street whiz Sherman McCoy, once a self-proclaimed Master of the Universe ("There was . . . no limit whatsoever!"), and certain oblivion, and it isn't his aristocratic pedigree, his Yale chin, or his million-dollar income. No, it's the "stone courage," the street smarts, the "donkey" obstinacy of New York City's Irish. Indeed, in Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, New York's Irish cops and lawyers, with their deep cynicism and their even deeper, seemingly archaic loyalties, seem to be all that stands between the city's barely realized civil order and anarchy. For among the many things that *Bonfire* is — an ingenious comic extravaganza, a courtroom melodrama, an apocalyptic rumination — it is first and perhaps foremost a 659-page love letter to New York's Irish wiseguys.

Hey, gedoudahere!

But true!

McCoy encounters these fantastic, hardheaded tough guys — Tommy Killian, Bill Martin, Ed Quigley, Bernie Fitzgibbon and a host of others, including the "Jewish Shamrock" Goldberg — when he becomes part of the "chow" fed

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to New York's criminal justice system. Larry Kramer, the pettifogging assistant district attorney prosecuting McCoy for the hit-and-run injury of a eighteen-year-old black kid from the South Bronx's "Edgar Allen Poe" projects, tells why the Irish are revered. "He knew that something in his (Det. Martin's) eyes would make the boy sense Irish Cop Who Don't Back Off . . . and for the five hundredth time in his career as an assistant district attorney in the Bronx he paid silent homage to that most mysterious and coveted of male attributes, Irish machismo."

Tommy Killian, the fast-tawkin ("This case has nothing to do with justice. This is a war.") criminal lawyer tutoring the wayward bond salesman McCoy on how to survive an "icy dip in the real world," outlines the origins of this singularly Irish urban competence. "Ed Quigley is the best," he says, explaining McCoy's need for a private investigator. "He's your basic hardcore New York Hell's Kitchen Irishman. The kids Ed ran with all became hoodlums or cops. The ones that became cops were the ones that the church got a hook into, the ones that cooked a little bit from guilt. But they all like the same things. They all like to butt heads and loosen people's teeth. The only difference is, if you are a cop, you can do it legally with a priest nodding over you and looking the other way at the same time. Ed was a hell of a cop. He was a fucking reign of terror."

So much for the finer points of casuistry.

As the title proclaims, there is an apocalyptic tone to this, Wolfe's first novel. "Back to blood! Them and us!" New York's Jewish mayor feverishly fantasizes as he is driven from a Harlem stage by a black mob in the opening scene. Thirty-one chapters later, *Bonfire* concludes with a riot in a Bronx courtroom. In between is the hunt for Sherman McCoy, the "Great White Defendant," the answer to Bronx District Attorney Abe Weiss's ("Captain Ahab") most fervent reelection prayers.

For $75,000 Killian and Quigley deflect the press ("The lice of public life!"), the courts, and the politicians, all of whom conspire to lynch McCoy by his prep-school neck. McCoy, shrewd exploiter of a decade of giddy speculation in the bond market, unadulterated Wasp, doyen of Park Avenue, and the blue-blood incarnation of contemporary privilege and status has stumbled into an unrelieved nightmare. While driving his mistress home from the airport, he takes a wrong turn and ends up in the most desolate section of the South Bronx. When two menacing-looking black youths appear, his mistress hits one with the car. An absurd concatenation of events dissolves McCoy's once insulated world.

Wolfe, papa of New Journalism, author of *The Right Stuff*, the sociologist who labeled the 1970s "The Me Generation," and the venomous ventriloquist of *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, crams a lifetime of unblinking social observation into *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Once again we are held in awe by this writer's mastery of point of view, his attention to the subtlest calibrations of social status, his lucid exposition, and Rabelaisian humor.

Novelist Wolfe, like journalist Wolfe, is suspicious of sentiment. *Inter faeces et urinam* we are born, and this author seems gleeful about it. Obsessively he mocks the worldly pretensions of his characters by juxtaposing every kind of pride with the crude corruption and folly of the flesh. McCoy must press "the pants of his two-thousand-dollar Savile Row suit [against] the bare toilet seat, his New & Lingwood cap-toed shoes . . . against the china toilet bowl" when reading of his impending doom. And in the novel's most pointed burlesque, the corpse of one sybarite is defenestrated from the ladies' room of a fashionable Manhattan restaurant. He was boorish enough to die over dinner.

Bonfire is as ambitious as its operatic title suggests, for it is about nothing less than the self-deluding conceits, the habitual cowardices, and anomie rotting the sills and cracking the foundation of "the greatest city of the twentieth century." Often brilliantly, always extravagantly, Wolfe conjures up the cacophony of voices, the avalanche of lies, the vio-

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lence, vulgarity, and greed that make New York such an intoxicant. With near perfect pitch, he describes life in and around the besieged Bronx County Building, where a bizarre parade of assistant district attorneys, lawyers, cops, jurists, con men, and thugs puts a face on the abstraction known as the criminal justice system.

However, in the middle of all this Dickensian turmoil, *Bonfire* places the unsatisfactory enigma of Sherman McCoy. McCoy's arrogance, his elitist assumptions, and narrow but towering ambition are readily established. But his obtuse emotional life and bombastic self-pity are too broad a stroke. Despite a welter of details — we know the price of everything he wears, of every piece of furniture in his $3-million-dollar apartment — our protagonist remains something of a sociological construct.

Of course, McCoy's fate is emblematic. He's "a Wall Street egalitarian . . . a respecter only of performance," the quintessential Me Generation achiever. He "wants it now." This is also, by a telling coincidence, the code of the street hustler and the revolutionary. McCoy and his fellow plutocrats disdain traditional obligations and even prejudices. Money is the only measure of a man, and the display of wealth a necessary social duty. That display is of course a way of reconfirming rank and status, but it amounts to little more than an endless, aimless craving to be admired and amused. In one character's after-dinner excursus on Poe's "Mask of the Red Death," McCoy recognizes his own fatal hubris. "The excitement is so intense and the pleasure is so unbridled and the gowns and the food and the drink and the flesh are so sumptuous — [but] that is all they have. Families, homes, children, the great chain of being, the eternal tide of chromosomes mean nothing to them any longer . . . they whirl about one another, endlessly, particles in a doomed atom."

McCoy's harrowing descent into the maelstrom of the "other" New York brings him up shatteringly against the futility of such an existence. He is abandoned by business associates, neighbors, and friends. A very Poe-like terror descends. "Remember who you are," his justifiably aggrieved wife scolds him. But when a man dedicated to the atomized whirl is spun off, he discovers that the fall, like his climb to the top, knows no limit. As McCoy explains to Killian, "All these people . . . it's all a thread, Tommy, all these ties that make up your life, and when it breaks . . . that's it. . . . Your self . . . is other people, all the people you're tied to, and it's only a thread."

The pedagogic tone here is jarring, but Wolfe, like all satirists, is at heart a moralist. The disintegration of the self, of which Poe prophetically wrote, is the horror painted in lurid colors across *Bonfire's* huge canvas. Edgar Allen Poe Towers in the South Bronx — Poe, the novel reminds us, lived out his last days in the Bronx — is the most acute manifestation of disconnectedness. Morally, the barbarism of the tenements and jails is the obverse of the social barbarism practiced by the wealthy and so deftly lampooned throughout this novel.

That soullessness is the vanity threatening to consume everything in *Bonfire*. In "The Me Generation and the Third Great Awakening," Wolfe cited De Tocqueville on the insecurity inherent in an egalitarian society. "Not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, it hides his descendants from him, and divides him from his contemporaries; it continually turns him back into himself, and threatens, at last, to enclose him entirely in the solitude of his own heart." Although Wolfe dismissed such a dire prognosis for America in that essay, clearly that is the fate McCoy and his unlikely soulmates among the poor endure. In this sense, Wolfe's admiration for the solidity of New York's working class (obviously, they need not be Irish), suggests that only archaic loyalties keep us civilized.

This unsentimental report on New York City's ethnic and racial warfare, so eerily echoed in today's headlines, could be wound much tighter. Wolfe is still very much the reporter, and at some gut level these characters are more observed than fully imagined. Still, an exhilarating intelligence animates nearly every scene. And while there is in these pages blarney aplenty — what Irishman won't be gratified as well as astonished to come upon a kind of word for "Irish machismo" at this late date — Wolfe has also given his story a portentousness that would make the master of American Gothic proud.

DIVERSITY & FERMENT

THE LITERARY GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

Edited by Robert Alter & Frank Kermode
Harvard/Belknap, $29.95, 675 pp.

Pheme Perkins

For the past twenty years a quiet revolution has been going on among biblical scholars. History, archaeology, and philology may serve to reconstruct histories of Israel and of earliest Christianity, but they are no longer sufficient to understand the Bible. Exegetes have been turning to methods of analysis grounded in literary criticism to unlock the power of biblical narrative, poetry, and even its law. The editors, two of the leading figures in this movement, have drawn together an international group of scholars to write essays on the individual books of the Bible as well as a series of general essays.

Any such collection will be uneven. On the whole, the work on the Hebrew Bible is closer to the "cutting edge" of scholarly literary analysis today than that on the New Testament. Many of the New Testament articles are five to ten years behind and for the most part fail to incorporate the contributions being made by younger American scholars.

Though the introduction claims that the book will be largely based on the

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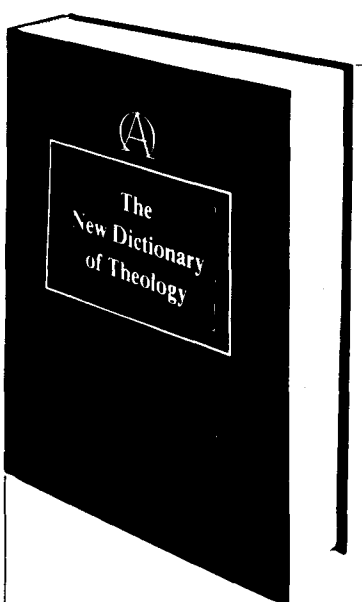
King James Version, that is rarely the case. This book is not about the "KJV as literature." All of the authors pay careful attention to the Hebrew and Greek texts as they go about their work. Most provide their own translations, since it is impossible to demonstrate the complex literary relationships between passages in the Bible without doing so. General essays on English translations and the formation of the biblical canon provide the reader with an understanding of how the text which he or she thinks of as "the Bible" came into existence.

The other general essays address somewhat more specialized problems. New Testament writings are compared to the literary genres of Greco-Roman antiquity. The contribution of Canaanite literature to understanding the mythic associations of biblical stories and images as well as the construction of much biblical poetry is particularly fascinating. Since poetry is such a large part of the Hebrew Scriptures, Robert Alter has contributed a second essay summarizing his work on Hebrew poetry. The distinguished anthropologist, Edmund Leach, adds a fascinating essay unraveling the symbolism associated with Jesus' choosing fishermen disciples on the edge of the wilderness. His approach to unlocking the ritual and mythic structures in the Bible has already influenced several younger American scholars (see E. S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*, Harper & Row, 1986). Another general essay explains how midrash and allegory functioned as modes of interpreting the Bible for the first generations of readers.

The editors did not look for a unified understanding of what literary analysis of the Bible involves, nor did they establish a topical format to be followed in the essays on individual books. Consequently, it is often difficult to maintain a sense of how one author compares with another. But on the positive side, one gains a sense of the real diversity and ferment in this approach to the Bible. The Twelve Minor Prophets and the Pauline Epistles are each allotted a single chapter. The Johannine Epistles and Catholic Epistles are tucked in at the end of chapters and hence receive no serious treatment at all. Nor does the chapter on the Pauline Epistles treat the Pastorals or Colossians and Ephesians. On the whole the treatment of the Pauline letters focuses on their "pastoral rhetoric." Issues about the narrative or mythic structures presupposed by the apostle are left aside.

Although apocalyptic rhetoric and symbolism enjoys a great deal of interest in literary and exegetical circles today, it is not well treated in this collection. One might have liked to see general essays on both prophecy and apocalyptic as well as more thorough discussion of the apocalyptic part of Daniel, which is part of that work that is determinative for the New Testament tradition. However, a fine essay on the history of interpretation of Revelation makes an important contribution to understanding the complex relationships between meaning and patterns of interpretation.

The editors have excluded ideological approaches to the literary analysis of the Bible (e.g. Marxism, deconstruction-



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ism, and feminism). However, several of the individual articles (e.g. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther) incorporate the results of feminist analysis of those books.

Most of the essays on the Hebrew Bible require detailed reading of the text. Just as this book is not a "literary guide" that speaks with a single voice or point of view, it is also not an introduction to the basic structure or content of the books discussed. Readers unfamiliar with a particular book had best read it through once or twice before wading into the discussion of that book presented here. Teachers without training in biblical criticism who attempt to use this book as a classroom text may find themselves running for Bible dictionaries and commentaries.

As its editors claim, this book will teach educated people how to read the Bible in a sophisticated way. However, the reader must invest a considerable effort in the process. Otherwise this guide will find itself on the bookshelf alongside the Bible, which one also intends to read "someday."

THE ENGINE & THE ENGINEER

GOD AND THE NEW HAVEN RAILWAY
AND WHY NEITHER ONE
IS DOING VERY WELL

George Dennis O'Brien
Beacon, $14.95, 159 pp.

David Toolan

Have you wanted, lately, to read a book of theology while commuting to and from New York, Boston, or Chicago? I suspect not. The tone, you probably fear, will be lugubrious, appropriate for announcing foreclosure on the mortgage; or the style, you may think, will be solemn high, too specialized, and therefore alien. Well, guess again. Dennis O'Brien, currently president of the University of Rochester, contends that "any decent divinity is at-hand in the texture of weekdays" — even, that is to say, on the 6:10 from Grand Central. He shows that theology can be written with panache and read with pleasure. In fact, he has accomplished the rare feat of translating the plodding, humorless Germanic prose of Karl Rahner's fundamental theology into stylish wisecracking American English.

He makes it look easy. The great virtue of O'Brien's book, which in a former day would have been called philosophical apologetics to the Gospel, is its tone — flippant, bantering, irreverent. He does not *prove* anything ("This book is an attempt at what to say when proofs are constitutionally out of order"). Basically, he seeks to make sense of biblical religion. "How," he asks, " is the modern commuter to engage his or her imagination with that biblical narrative so overstocked with sheep and figs?" No small problem; Jesus never dealt with leverage buy-outs. O'Brien is candid: "The Bible is one of the more implausible books on the best-seller list. . . . It is not only the showstoppers that are the problem; all that ferocious war poetry hardly conforms to the UN charter."

Undaunted, O'Brien starts by setting forth the human condition: "a mystery story with a sage-brush setting scripted by Samuel Beckett." Genuine religion, a kind of overcommitment that horrifies Epicurean and stoic rationers of desire, arises, he claims, from the frustration of worthy desires impossible to abandon. Hence our (Kierkegaardian) dilemma: we are caught between the wild-West drifter's dreams of unlimited possibility, always riding off into the sunset, and the settler's need to hunker down to bed, board, and taxes. Where do we fit among the superpowers (i.e., the state, celebrity stars, nature, gods), O'Brien asks, and how do we avoid both the dreamy, empty quest and also avoid settling for what we are stuck with? The biblical answer doesn't get around or above these questions so much as *into* the thick of them. "What makes the [biblical] story of interest is that the story of Jesus is the story of everybody faced with the problem of expressing the fullness of human dignity with a limited repertoire."

Now the problem here isn't where the reader is likely to place it. O'Brien can be wisely contrary. "Being a facsimile god is not tough for us to accept; being a genuine human is." Which is to say that the conundrum of God emptying himself to become human (Phil. 2:6) is our problem too. In this regard, I found O'Brien's most explosive chapter the one (titled "Saints and Sexpots") that differentiates Christianity from both Platonism and Hugh Hefner's philosophy. Where *Playboy* inflates perfectionist fancy, the Bible disconcerts the god in us by insisting, "You are your body." The issue is our own resistance to embodiment, our inveterate docetism. "It isn't just the Holy One Blessed Be He who has problems being incarnate flesh, it is the ordinary man on the bus who is all thumbs when it comes to incarnating." The restless transcenders — Socrates, Faust, Don Juan, Shane, and Hugh Hefner — sidestep the scandal here by offering ideal figures of aspiration that have been air-brushed clean of dirt, sweat, and bad odor. In contrast to the transcenders, "Judaism and Christianity offer only those neurotic Portnoys from Newark and the dreadful Dedalus from Dublin" — presumably unsalvageable cases.

O'Brien likes it that way. (Given his job, he'd better.) He has learned to locate the scandal in Christianity by listening to the Jewish tradition. He aptly cites Franz Rosenzweig's startling dictum that Jewish belief is "not the content of a testimony, but rather the product of reproduction. The Jew, engendered by a Jew, attests his belief by continuing to procreate the Jewish people." The Jew is himself the belief. Similarly, Christian doctrines in the Socratic mold, infallible teaching, are derivative and quite secondary, in O'Brien's view, to a sense of participating in an "unfailing life" present in an ongoing body of disciples. Sample:

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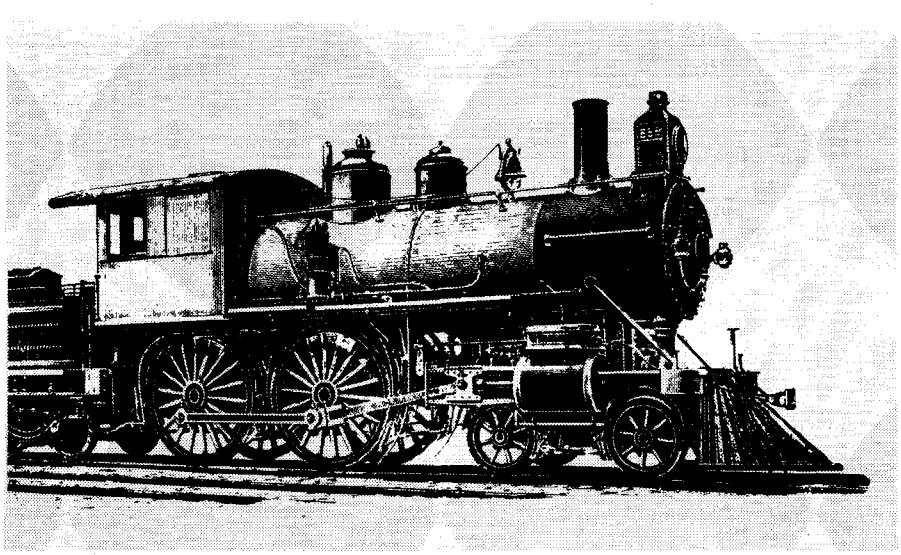
"I cannot give you a judgment on whether the world is good, very good or bad, awful. That is a complicated question. In what sense 'good' or 'bad'? But pardon me, my children need attending." That is a biblical conversation.

As a graft on Judaism, then, Christianity is not carried by sage judgment but consists in procreating Portnoys and Dublin Dedaluses who, in seizing their own day, life, and history, reiterate God's definitive yea-saying — in the Christ — to a human body, quotidian event, and messy history. Willingly then, the Christian is implicated in this earthen plot made holy by God's "Yes."

The problematic part of this immensely graceful and lightsomely sophisticated book, in my judgment, comes with O'Brien's interpretation of Christianity's uniqueness among the world religions. O'Brien is persuasive (though the writing grows heavy here) in arguing for the importance of finding meaning beyond the self, in a saving good Samaritan, and ultimately, the wisdom of grounding our fallible life in a truly cosmic gesture of love. In developing this theme, he argues tellingly against the American penchant for self-help religion. (By the way, he has some fun with the "Mafia godfather" deity of fundamentalists, liberal ethical culture, and the inadequacy of Mother Nature as an untalkative respondent to incurably voluble human beings.) Fair enough. What is not so fair is the author's sharp contrast between the Judeo-Christian tradition of "salvation" and religions of "enlightenment" — mainly designated as oriental. O'Brien downgrades the latter, along with their meditative paths, as falling under the category of Pelagian self-help.

To my ears, this sounded like the oversimplification of an older apologetic which, in principle, Dr. O'Brien had successfully laid aside. Does an argument for the distinctiveness of Christianity require us to ignore the theme of incarnate cosmic love to be found in certain forms of Hinduism and the *bodhisattva* tradition within Mahayana Buddhism? I think not. O'Brien's sharp dichotomy echoes the theological one-upmanship of nineteenth-century Protestant students of comparative religion. But Hinduism is many things, as is Buddhism — and anyone raised within the tradition of Catholic mysticism and the subtle Tridentine definition of cooperative grace should make discriminations and see affinities between East and West where a Mayflower or Cavalier descendant would not. The animus against Eastern meditation, I felt, was particularly regrettable when O'Brien discusses prayer (which is cleverly explicated on an analogy with cursing). But what can his message be, I wondered, except to encourage the commuter-reader's religious parochialism? Or worse, to reinforce a popular neglect of spiritual exercise?

In sum, however, O'Brien's humor, like Karl Barth's good cheer, saves the train ride.



WALKS ON THE WILD SIDE

READING AMERICA

ESSAYS ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

Denis Donoghue

Alfred A. Knopf, $22.95, 320 pp.

Peter LaSalle

Time was when it was tough to find real issues arising in university English departments. Arguments usually seemed to involve questions like whether graded final papers left on the linoleum outside professors' office doors for students to pick up should remain there ad infinitum, as the cleaning people perpetually dry-mopped around them, or simply be disposed of after a semester.

Then things turned noisy. And most of the noise came from some scholars telling others more traditional that they had been studying literature the wrong way all these years. Armed with complicated ideas on language and reading that had the ring of theoretical physics and that were imported, naturally, from France, this new breed got to the point where they started announcing that the critic's response to the text was more important than the original work itself. The movement often caught on like, well, Perrier water, and departments raced to strengthen themselves in deconstruction theory or whatever derivative of it was currently in, lest they be left behind.

Most of that has subsided now. But I always admired Denis Donoghue for his open-minded move to fairly examine all these new theories in his book *Ferocious Alphabets*, which appeared in 1981, and say that in the end he had to take his stand and argue for the specialness of the author's vision, one of the true indicators of our essential humanity: "I detest the current ideology which refers, gloatingly, to the death of the author, the obsolescence of self, the end of man, and so forth." Donoghue, Irish-born and now a chaired

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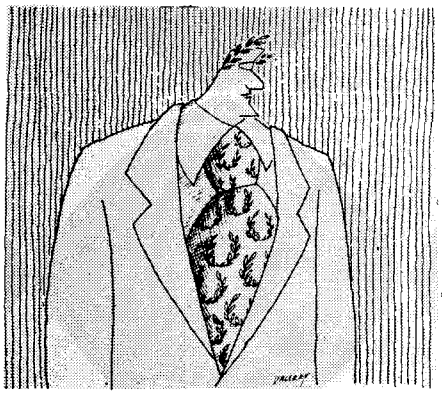

professor at New York University, brings that spirit to this book, a collection of essays and reviews on American literature. The essays treat Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dickinson, James, Eliot, and Stevens, among others, and the reviews deal chiefly with modern and contemporary poets, from Marianne Moore and Hart Crane to Sylvia Plath and John Ashbery.

Reading a book of this sort gives anyone occasion to think of American literature in larger terms. And if I had to come up with a specific large term that might encompass it, more than less, I would settle on "wild." Of course, others have said the same. I like it because it not only conveys the energetic, unruly essence (often an uncivil disobedience) that distinguishes most of our literature from, let's say, that of France on the whole or England on the whole; it also suggests a closely related word, "wilderness," which somehow accurately echoes the scope of both the subject and the endeavor in so much American writing.

Try "wild" or "wilderness" on almost any of the aforementioned writers and it works pretty well. Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau were wild. Dickinson wandered through the inner wilderness, Whitman the outer. Even Henry James, whose lump of a figure always looked utterly correct in those high starched collars of the photographs, was wild, or at least a good portion of his best work probed what happened, for better or worse, when a basic American wildness found itself in the china closet of the European scene.

And so for Donoghue's observations here. With consistently handsome prose, his essays strive to give a most balanced reading. For example, on Dickinson, he summarizes the work of the major biographers and the contributions of the major critics, as he also lets himself go for a while on several particular tacks that intrigue him; one is Harold Bloom's distinction between "subjective" and "confessional" poetry, and that spurs him to toss in a bit of sound observation on Wallace Stevens, too.

The structure of these essays may be loose, but Donoghue says in his introduction that he no longer wishes to make certain authors "obey" preconceived formulae, a shortcoming he detects in some of his own earlier work. To my taste, his strength in this book is not in the essay but in the shorter form of the review. As a reviewer, strangely, he seems less timid to present overall conclusions, which are, however, always arrived at via his characteristic honesty and fairness. At one point in a review of a book on the poet H.D., he expresses his affection for her verse point-blank, something I find commendable: "What I love in the latter poems is their voice, sign of self-possession often in fear of losing itself, in fear but not in despair." And in a consideration of John Ashbery's *Shadow Train*, he levels with the reader from the start: "Of these eight hundred lines, I estimate that I can make sense out of five hundred." He then goes on to examine how the other three hundred do contribute an extra, certainly haunting, dimension.

Though *Reading America* announces itself as a project quite ambitious by its very title, Donoghue also explains in the introduction that it is simply a gathering of pieces that haven't previously been published in his other books on American literature. Which is to suggest, there is solid material here, but solidity without special intent or movement, and Donoghue's opening apology of sorts would lead me to believe he doesn't rank it among his major efforts. Maybe a description that he tags on a book of Auden's essays he reviews here describes *Reading America* too: "a commonplace book, and a good one."

Finally, concerning the business of criticism in its application to American literature in particular, I, for one, believe that it is a different ilk of analysis that has always done true justice to the writing. Donoghue's work, as good as it is, is limited by its genteel traditions. And the testy, high-tech approach that the French like for their literary theorizing, and surely for the architecture of the Pompidou Center too, doesn't strike the right note either. What does is maybe the "wild" criticism of D.H. Lawrence in *Studies in Classic American Literature* and the "wild" criticism of Charles Olson in *Call Me Ishmael*. Granted, both were primarily writers rather than critics (and writers, Donoghue mentions here, in whom he has a keen interest as critics). But such fare — like the literature it examines, lyrical, risk-taking, expansive, tramping to the inner and outer wilderness — can also emerge from English departments, as Leslie Fiedler and his energetically Freudian conjurings about Huck on the raft and the rest has shown so well.

CONFESSIONS OF A ROLE MODEL

AND A VOICE TO SING WITH

Joan Baez

Summit Books, $19.95, 378 pp.

Patrick Lacefield

I honestly can't remember when I first heard Joan Baez, her achingly pure soprano floating out across the airwaves. *And a Voice to Sing With* is Baez's second autobiography, the first, *Daybreak*, having been published in 1968. Baez herself remembers it as fickle and inconsistent. Perhaps a bit closer to Kahil Gibran than an honest account. No matter. It served for the moment, just as *And a Voice* does now.

Baez's voice at a recent Carnegie Hall benefit to raise money for the anti-*contra* campaign in Congress sounded deeper to me and the high notes came harder. Even so, the politics haven't changed. She is,

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as ever, the passionate believer in Gandhian nonviolence, the previous sanctimony now effectively seasoned with irreverence and self-deprecating humor in her concerts and in the book.

Baez, however, has come as close as any to making pacifism and nonviolence seem an effective tool for social change. In doing so she has frequently crossed figurative swords with an American left that hypocritically criticized her prominence ("Don't follow leaders," sayeth the gospel according to Bob Dylan) while asking for her money and time. At times she has been read out of the left for her attraction to "unfashionable" causes. Like Mike Harrington, Irving Howe, and other democratic radicals with no illusions about the nature of left-wing dictatorships, Baez drew fire from the ultra-left during the war for her lack of solidarity with the Viet Cong. In particular, she strongly identified with pacifist Buddhist elements in South Vietnam who opposed the war. Now, like the others, she draws fire from the same folks who have since moved from Maoism to Ronald Reagan and Ollie North's corner. Before she was a pretty bourgeois pacifist, now she and those who have stood their ground while others were changing theirs are fronting for Stalinism in Central America and naively oppose military preparedness here at home.

In a striking chapter, Baez describes being trapped in Hanoi during the Christmas bombing of 1972 — the fear and death and solidarity all around her and her own simultaneous bravery and cowardice. This is not a woman afraid to expose and, yes, even judge her weaknesses and occasional arrogance. Later, when she went public with her criticisms of widespread human rights violations by the new Vietnam government, she was excoriated by many erstwhile comrades. She was charged with "objectively" (there's that fatal word) aiding the U.S. government's ongoing hostility toward the new regime. "I don't believe in criticizing any socialist government publicly," William Kunstler stated matter-of-factly. He was one of the more honest critics. It was not the left's finest hour by a long shot.

From there Baez went on to hook up with Amnesty International and successfully petition President Carter to have the U.S. Sixth Fleet pick up thousands of Vietnamese boat people. Her travels took her from Cambodian refugee camps to Lech Walesa's side and on to stubbornly arguing disarmament with Andrei Sakharov and campaigning against Reagan's Central American follies. Rather than heed the fashion of the times or the path of least resistance, Baez seems to have taken up Davy Crockett's old motto: "Be sure you're right, then go ahead."

Even if so much of what passed for radicalism in the sixties was ephemeral and trendy, Joan Baez never was. Role model then, role model now. Far from being timeless she is, once again, timely. At her recent Carnegie Hall appearance she offered some wisdom from Vietnamese Buddhism in dedicating a song to all those who suffer or have died from AIDS. "Do not disassociate yourself from other people's suffering. If there isn't any suffering around you, go out and find some."

As advice in these all-too-self-centered of times, that'll do quite nicely.

REVIEWERS

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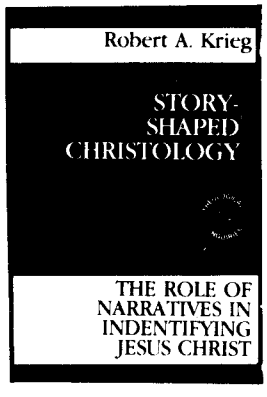

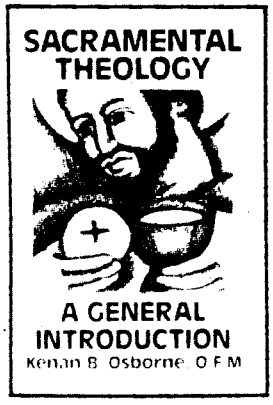

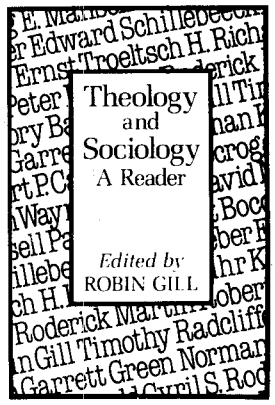

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